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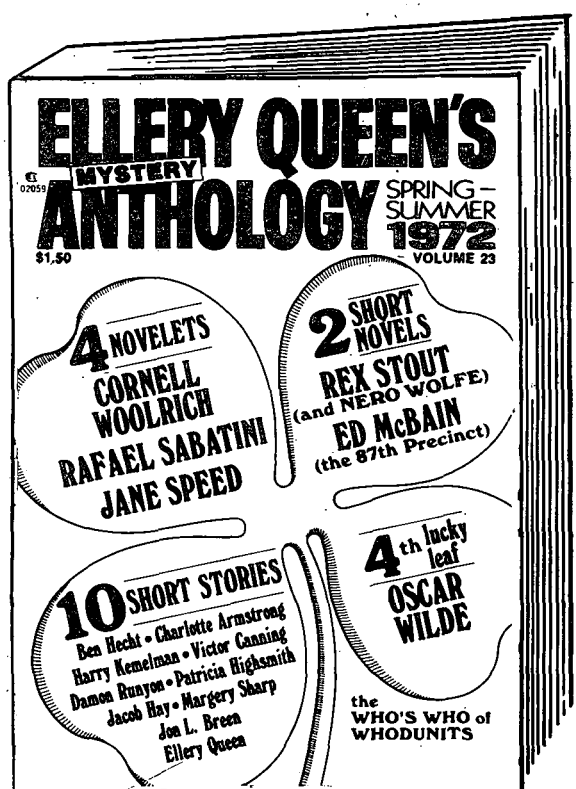

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ELLERY QUEEN'S
Mystery Magazine

All-New All-American Issue

THE KIDNAPED PAINTING	Robert Edward Eckels	6
THE BABE RUTH MURDER CASE	Jon L. Breen	14
THE STRANGER WHO CAME KNOCKING	Nedra Tyre	20
NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN	J. F. Peirce	40
THE LAST SASSETTA	Haskell Barkin	49
THE PRAYER WHEELS	Fritzi Franz Lumen	60
THE ASSASSIN	Edward Wellen	71
PONSONBY AND THE RANSOM NOTE	Alan K. Young	72
NO MOTIVE	Theodore Mathieson	81
THE EVENTS BETWEEN	Jane Speed	84
M AS IN MISSING	Lawrence Treat	99
THE SPY AND THE RELUCTANT COURIER	Edward D. Hoch	112
DR. COFFEE AND THE PARDELL CASE	Lawrence G. Blochman	128
THE JURY BOX	John Dickson Carr	79
INDEX TO VOLUME FIFTY-NINE		160–127

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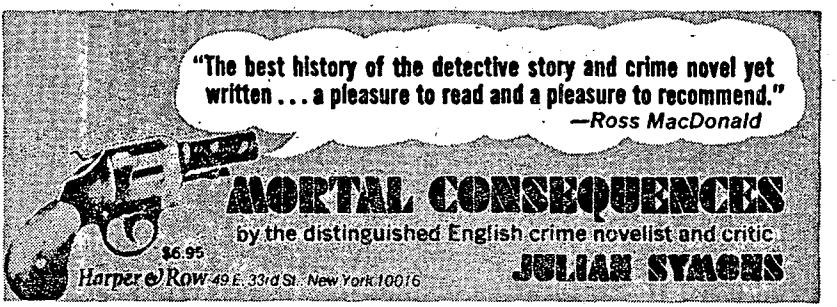
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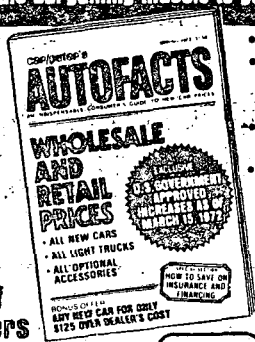
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a NEW L-and-L story by

ROBERT EDWARD ECKELS

L-and-L—Lang and Lovell—"outside man" and "inside man"—and two of the sharpest, shrewdest, most engaging con men now operating. This time it's Hollingsworth's Leda and the Swan, a painting commissioned by Charles the Second in 1672, a "minor masterpiece" insured for $250,000. L-and-L—their business slogan could be: MASTERPIECES MADE TO ORDER . . .

THE KIDNAPED PAINTING

by ROBERT EDWARD ECKELS

The blonde at the receptionist's desk gave me a brilliantly false smile and when I told her my reason for being there she pointed to a door marked "Neil Savarin, Chief Adjuster." I went on through without knocking, thinking that another girl would be on guard behind it; but instead it was Savarin's private office, and he blinked up at me curiously from behind his desk.

"My name's Harry Lang, Mr. Savarin," I explained. "The girl outside said you were expecting me."

"Oh, yes," he said, rising. "Yes." He was a short balding man with a round shiny face, a wise guy's mouth and eyes that kept sliding away from you. "It was good of you to come."

I smiled wryly. "Your note promising a financial reward if I did was too tempting to ignore," I said. "But, frankly, I didn't expect an insurance company. So if it was just a gimmick to get me here so you could sell me a policy, I'm afraid we've both wasted our time."

Savarin smiled back and shook his head. "No," he said, "I'm not selling. I'm buying—works of art. Or one particular work of art, at least. And I understand that you can—uh—supply them on demand."

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That was a rather neat way of putting what Lovell and I did. Lovell was my partner. And if he was kind of a nut about some things, particularly the food he ate, he also had a large although somewhat specialized talent. He could forge a painting by any artist living or dead and do it so well that most of the time the original artist himself would swear it was genuine. I was the ouside man, specializing in selling the finished product to gullible art collectors.

But now, rather than give anything away, I studied Savarin warily. "Where did you pick up that bit of information?" I said.

Savarin shrugged. "From a mutual friend," he said. "A Miss Horgan. I believe you and she have had dealings together in the past."

I relaxed slightly and nodded. "Yes," I said. "And I guess if she vouches for you, you're all right."

"Then there's no reason we can't do business, is there?" Savarin said, smiling.

"That depends on what the business is," I said.

"I'm sure you'll find it agreeable," Savarin said. He waved me into a chair. Then he sat down behind his desk again, leaned back and folded his hands across his stomach. "What do you know about Hollingsworth's Leda and the Swan?" he said.

"Nothing," I said, "except that I assume it's a painting."

"It is," Savarin said. "And I'm surprised you haven't heard of it, because in its way it's a rather famous one. Charles the Second commissioned it in 1672 as a present for a young lady who'd caught his eye. The swan being a royal bird in England, the girl couldn't fail to understand and be flattered. But heavy-handed symbolism or not, the painting came to be considered something of a minor masterpiece. It was in the girl's family for generations—until the late 1950's, in fact, when it was finally sold to meet death duties. Since then it's changed hands several times. Most recently it was purchased by a man named August Wilding, who brought it to this country. Mr. Wilding, unfortunately, is our client."

"Unfortunately?" I said.

Savarin nodded. "Six months ago the painting was stolen. It was insured for a quarter of a million dollars, and needless to say, the prospect of having to pay out that much money doesn't make the company happy at all—particularly since it now appears that the painting was over-valued for insurance purposes."

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"How did that happen?" I said. "Didn't the company have its own expert appraise the painting?"

Savarin cleared his throat. "Yes," he said. "As a matter of fact, *I* examined the painting and it was on my recommendation that the policy was issued. It seemed safe enough at the time, but—let's just say that I made an error in judgment."

I nodded, knowing just what Savarin meant by an "error in judgment." He and the salesman had conspired to inflate the value of the painting and then had split the additional commission.

"I've been able to stall off a settlement so far," Savarin said, "because normally paintings this valuable aren't stolen so much as kidnaped and held for ransom. The pattern never varies. Someone 'finds' the painting and the insurance company pays a suitable 'ransom' for its return. Nobody's fooled, of course, but we aren't policemen. Our job is to get the painting back and save the company money.

"In this case, though, the painting's been missing too long. Six months and not a murmur about what's happened to it!" Savarin sounded genuinely aggrieved and for a moment his eyes actually held mine. Then they slipped away again. "Time's running out and I've got to come up with the painting soon." He paused significantly. "One way or the other."

I smiled. "In other words," I said, "if you can't find the original, a duplicate will do."

"Precisely," Savarin said. "Then everybody would be happy. The client, because for all he knew he had the original painting back. The company, because it had paid out only a fraction of the policy amount. Me, because there'd be no need to bring my original error out into the open. And last but not least, you, because I'd arrange for you to collect the 'ransom.' In this case, $25,000." He looked down modestly. "Less, of course, a small commission for me."

"Just how small is 'small'?" I said.

Savarin shrugged. "I'm not greedy," he said. "$5000 would do me quite nicely."

"I'm sure it would," I said, "but let's say $2500 instead, since all the risks and expenses are ours."

I expected Savarin to argue but instead he nodded quickly and said, "All right, but only if the painting's ready by the end of the month."

"It will be," I said. "We will need something to work from, though. Lovell's the artist, but I

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gather when you don't have the original to work from, there's some difficulty in getting the proportions and other details exactly right."

"No problem there," Savarin said. "The company has an exact description of the painting in its files plus some excellent color photos to scale. I'll give them to you."

"Then you've got yourself a deal," I said. We shook on it and I left. His hand left my own feeling slightly clammy. But $22,500 was $22,500, and nobody said you had to like the people you worked with.

I called Savarin two days before his end-of-the-month deadline ran out to tell him the painting was ready and to arrange delivery. Rather than risk being seen at his office too often, this time I picked him up a block away and drove around while he sat in the back seat comparing Lovell's duplicate Leda with his office records which I'd returned to be put back into the files.

He sat silently for a long time, and I was beginning to think he had some reservations. But when he did speak it was to say, "If I didn't know better I'd swear this was the original."

"Good," I said. "Let's hope the owner feels the same way. Since we didn't have the original to work from, we can't guarantee there aren't some minute differences. This painting should stand up, though, as long as it isn't compared with the original."

"No danger of that," Savarin said. "The original has long since disappeared into some other collection. And even if it hadn't, I doubt that Wilding would notice any differences. He's an art snob who buys paintings because other people have decided they're valuable. I doubt if he's looked at any of his acquisitions a dozen times except to show them off."

"Then all that needs to be done is for you to hand over the 'ransom' and I'll be on my way."

"That's not quite all," Savarin said. "First I have to call Wilding, tell him I've been contacted by the thief, and arrange for the three of us to meet."

"Now wait a minute," I said. "That wasn't part of the deal."

"Yes, it was, Harry," Savarin said. "You just weren't listening closely enough. Because if you want that 'ransom,' the deal has to look right. And that means it has to follow the usual pattern: contact, inspection, payoff."

I grumbled some more but in the end let myself be persuaded—although considering that Savarin held all trumps as

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far as the payoff was concerned, "persuaded" may be the wrong word. In any case, as soon as we were agreed, I dropped Savarin off near his office and returned to the studio that Lovell and I had rented, taking the painting back with me.

Savarin called me there about thirty minutes later. "It's all set," he said. "I just talked to Wilding and he's anxious to settle. Bring the painting to Room 415 of the Hotel Continental at four. That 'ransom' is as good as yours."

"It better be," I said.

I arranged to get to the hotel first, but hung around the edge of the lobby until I saw Savarin and an older, taller man with a flushed heavy-browed face cross to the elevators and go up. I gave them another ten minutes to get settled, then followed them.

Savarin opened the door at my knock with such alacrity that he must have been waiting just inside it. He frowned when he saw my empty hands. "Where's the painting?" he demanded.

"You didn't actually think I'd bring it with me, did you?" I said mildly, stepping into the room. "For all I knew, this place could have been crawling with cops."

Savarin gave me a disgusted look, apparently feeling you could carry realism too far. "Well, you can see for yourself it isn't."

"So I can," I said in the same mild tone. "Now. Did you bring the reward?"

Savarin took an envelope from his breast pocket and counted out the contents. There was exactly $22,000, which meant that he'd cut himself in for an extra $500. But this wasn't the time to quibble about that. I crossed to the phone and dialed the desk. "This is Room 415," I said. "Will you have someone bring up the suitcase I checked with you a little while ago?"

As I hung up, Wilding smiled ruefully from the bed where he'd been sitting quietly all this time. "You don't take anything for granted, do you, young man?" he said.

"I try not to," I said. "It's my way of staying healthy, wealthy, and out of jail."

Wilding continued to smile and watch me thoughtfully until a few minutes later a bellboy brought the suitcase up. I let Savarin tip him while I opened the suitcase and placed the painting on the bed for inspection.

"Well," Savarin said heartily, "that's the Leda all right. But just for the record, Mr. Wilding,

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will you please identify it?"

Wilding had risen and now he bent, frowning, over the painting. "I'm just not sure," he said.

"What?" Savarin said. "Don't you know your own painting?"

"Of course I do," Wilding said irritably. "But—" He frowned down at the painting again. "I wish the light were better here," he said.

"If it'll make you feel better," I said, "we can submit the painting for spectroscopic examination. That should prove whether it's genuine or not."

I ignored the startled glance Savarin cast over Wilding's back and concentrated on meeting Wilding's own steady gaze. After a long moment he said, "You'd be willing to submit this for scientific examination?"

"Of course," I said.

Wilding's eyes held mine for another second or two. Then he glanced back down at the painting, picked it up, and moved to the window with it. After studying it a while longer he said, "No, that won't be necessary. I can identify this as my painting."

"Fine," Savarin said, rubbing his hands together. "Then it's all settled." Beaming broadly, he handed over the envelope. I checked the contents swiftly just to make sure he hadn't pulled a switch on me, then slipped it into my coat pocket.

"Well, gentlemen," I said, "it's been a pleasure doing business with you. Now, if you'll excuse me—"

"Ahh," Savarin said, "I will need a receipt from you for that reward." He smiled at Wilding. "There's no need for you to stay around, though, Mr. Wilding. I'll bring the papers for you to sign to your office tomorrow."

Wilding put the painting in its suitcase, shook hands with Savarin, nodded briefly to me, and left.

"Whew!" Savarin said after the door had closed after Wilding. "That was close."

"Not really," I said.

He raised his eyebrows. "No?" he said. "What would you have done if he'd taken you up on that offer to have a spectroscopic examination?"

"It wouldn't have made any difference," I said. "There was a spectrograph in those records you gave me, made at the time the painting was insured. I took the precaution of replacing it with one made from a scraping taken off the copy. Any test would produce an exact duplicate—and 'prove' the copy was the original."

Savarin grinned appreciatively. "You really don't take

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anything for granted, do you?"

"Like I told the man," I said, "I try not to. Now, you said you wanted a receipt."

Savarin produced a form—for $25,000. I signed it and left, after promising to keep in touch in case any additional opportunities to work together came up.

My car was parked two blocks from the hotel. I went to it, drove around the block a couple of times to make sure I wasn't followed, then cut straight out to Wilding's estate.

He was waiting for me in his study, his tie loosened but otherwise dressed as he had been in the hotel room. Seated in an armchair across from him, her shapely legs crossed comfortably and with a drink in her hand, was Miss Horgan. She was an attractive girl, about 30 or so, with long blonde hair that looked as if it might be natural and an open, almost ingenuous expression concealing a devious and larcenous mind.

"Well," I said to her, "this is a surprise."

She smiled at me. "You didn't really think I'd miss the payoff, did you, Harry?"

"No," I said, "knowing you, I guess I didn't." I took out the envelope Savarin had given me, counted out $2000 as her share for having helped set him up, and divided the rest between Wilding and myself, $10,000 each.

He looked at it oddly. "Shouldn't there be $250 more for me?" he said.

"Savarin chiseled himself in for an extra $500," I said, "knowing I couldn't make an issue of it with you there."

Wilding nodded and stuffed his money in his pocket. Miss Horgan looked sympathetic. "That's just what I'd expect that creep to do," she said. "It was just too bad you had to give him anything."

I shrugged. "It couldn't be helped," I said. "But if it makes you feel any better he won't enjoy it long. Because in about two weeks Lovell will contact him and Mr. Wilding here with the *real* Leda. Savarin will claim it's a fraud, of course. But—" I smiled "—Mr. Wilding's doubts will be revived and he'll insist on a scientific examination. Which won't alarm Savarin since he thinks I switched spectrographs in the company records. But since I happened to lie about that, there won't be any difficulty at all establishing which is the real original. And the insurance company will find itself in the unenviable position of paying two 'rewards' for the same painting. You can imagine what will happen to Savarin after that."

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"Beautiful," Miss Horgan said. "So that's why you needed the duplicate."

"Yes," Wilding said. "It isn't as profitable as faking a loss to collect the whole policy, but it is a lot safer. And, more importantly, I can collect and still continue to own the painting openly." He beamed at me. "You were a genius to dream this up, Harry, a genius," he said.

"I won't argue with that," I said. "Incidentally, you'd better let me take the original with me now. I'd rather not be seen coming here too often."

"Of course," Wilding said. He left the room, returning a few minutes later with the original Leda which he packed in my suitcase.

Miss Horgan smiled and raised her glass. "Well," she said, "here's to a successful job successfully carried out."

"I'll drink to that," I said.

Lovell was pacing nervously when I got back to the studio. He bit his thumb when he saw the painting. "So he gave you the original, did he?" he said.

"Of course," I said. "We're partners. So why wouldn't he?"

"I don't know," Lovell said. "But I was sort of hoping he wouldn't. I don't like this idea of recontacting the insurance company—I don't like it at all."

"To tell you the truth, Lovell," I said equably, "neither do I. So now that we've got the original, why don't we just move on? I'm sure we'll find somebody who'll pay us even more for it than we'd have gotten from the second 'ransom.' "

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a *NEW* Ed Gorgon story by

JON L. BREEN

Play ball! (the murder game begins)
Batter up! (the first suspect appears)
The umpire watches (the detective observes)

THE BABE RUTH MURDER CASE

by JON L. BREEN

The press boys called this one "The Babe Ruth Murder Case." Now they had their reasons for calling it that, but let me say at the outset that the Babe himself had nothing to do with it. He couldn't have, since it happened almost a quarter of a century after he died. It's regrettable that the Babe's name should even have been mentioned in connection with a murder investigation, and the more sentimental folks may want to read no further. But I'll tell the story because I think it's an interesting one, regardless of how it may reflect on our grand and glorious national pastime.

My name is Ed Gorgon. I have been a Major League umpire for about as long as Babe Ruth has been dead. But this particular case didn't happen in a Major League town; it happened in a large mid-western city that is as big as many with Major League franchises but which has not yet been able to land one for itself; so it still struggles along with one of the country's wealthier Triple-A clubs.

In that city there's a restaurant and bar called The Empty Sulky—harness racing being big in that part of the world—a sports hangout very much like sports hangouts in other cities. The walls are lined with autographed pictures of athletes and coaches, and various pieces of local sports memorabilia are on display. The sort of place where you seldom hear a word about ecology or Vietnam or Consciousness Three, but where the Dempsey-Tunney long count and Nashua-

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vs.-Swaps are still hot topics of controversy.

How I stumble into these things I'll never know, but I'm sitting in the bar with Lieutenant Steve Appleman, one of several police friends I've picked up in the last few years, and having a drink when Vince Cramer, the bartender at The Empty Sulky, walks up to our table and tells Steve he better come to his boss's office right away. It seems Mal Carter has been shot to death, an untimely event in that lots of people would like to have seen it happen lots sooner.

Mal Carter, the owner-manager of The Empty Sulky, is what's known as an unsavory character—and that's putting it politely. He has a finger, or so they say, in every organized crime pie in the city—gambling, drugs, you-name-it. He also is said to have a little blackmailing business going on the side. But try and prove any of this—in fact, that's just what Steve Appleman has been trying to do and that's why we're there that night, chasing a lead of Steve's that didn't pan out.

Just why The Empty Sulky continues to be a sports hangout with its undesirable reputation is another mystery. I can tell you numerous Commissioners' offices in various sports would have been happier if their impressionable lads stayed out of The Empty Sulky altogether; but nothing could be done because, as I say, no one could prove anything on Mal Carter.

But there he sits in his swivel chair, a bullet hole in his heart, looking surprised and dead. Nobody has heard a shot, but the office is fairly soundproof and The Empty Sulky is not a quiet place anyway. Any number of people could have gone in and out of his office unnoticed—it's along the same dark hallway as the rest rooms, so no one entering or leaving the office would likely be seen. The gun is not present—Steve says he expects to find it in a trash can in the alley but it probably won't help anyway.

"Didn't Carter have any better security arrangement than this?" Steve asks the bartender.

"Hell, no. Who'd want to kill the boss?" Vince Cramer says truculently, not I think with conscious irony.

Steve snorts. I can tell he thinks this will be a dilly of a case. He's got a bar full of suspects and not a Clue.

But then we find a Clue.

On Carter's desk, lying open to the present date, is his appointment book. There's only one name listed for that evening: Babe Ruth.

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"Babe Ruth!" says Steve. "Who the hell is Babe Ruth?"

"I think he used to play for the Yankees," says Vince, sarcastic on purpose this time.

"I know that, damn it. But that Babe Ruth is dead. Who's the Babe Ruth he had an appointment with?"

The big bartender shrugs. For a minute Steve and I just look at him, and I think we get the same message at about the same time. Vince Cramer is about six feet and barrel-chested, but he has thin spindly legs. He has a round amiable face and usually, but not at the moment, a wide grin. You could say he's a live ringer for Babe Ruth.

"Carter didn't call *you* Babe Ruth, did he?" Steve asks.

"No, people always tell me I look like the Babe, but the boss just called me Vince like everybody else. I don't know who he called Babe Ruth. But I do know he used phony names for people in his appointment book."

"Why would he do that?"

"How should I know?"

"So that if the police ever got a hold of his book they wouldn't know who his associates were or who he was blackmailing?"

"Blackmailing? Mal Carter?" Vince is doing his best to look incredulous.

"Come off it, Cramer! You know as well as I do that Carter was involved in every underhanded deal going on in this town."

"Nobody ever proved it. And I don't know nothin' about any blackmail."

"All right, all right. Any ballplayers in the joint tonight, Vince?"

Vince thinks a second, then his eyes light up. "Yeah. Frank Abbott. Now there's a Babe Ruth type for you! Fifty-seven home runs last season for a league record!"

Steve grins. "A suitable code name for him, wouldn't you say, Ed?"

"Could be," I nod.

A few minutes later Frank Abbott, a tall and burly youngster with an arrogant air, has joined us in Carter's office. The customers out front still don't know what's happened, but Steve has called headquarters to start sending the homicide squad, so they'll know soon—now all they know is that Vince Cramer has left the bar to a fill-in.

With Abbott is a little skinny red-haired guy who doesn't look like a ballplayer but is. Billy Lane is his name, and he's been a fringe player for several years; he once had a cup of coffee with Cleveland as a

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left-handed pitcher, but now he plays outfield. It turns out Lane and Abbott have gone into business locally in a clothing-store venture, and that's why they're still in town in the off-season.

"What the hell is this?" Abbott slurs at us. "We come in for a little drink and get worked over about a guy we never even saw before. Who's this Mal Carter, anyway?"

Steve is peeved. "What do you mean worked over? Nobody's worked anybody over. Do you know what worked over means?"

"Sure I do. And we're being psychologically worked over. Ain't we, Billy?"

Lane swallows and looks a little embarrassed.

"And who's this?" Abbott yaps, spotting me. "Not only can't I go out at night and stay away from cops, you bring us before a—what do they call these guys, Billy?"

"Arbiters," says Lane with a shaky smile.

"That's right, an arbiter. Where's your seeing-eye dog, arbiter?"

There may be something more disgusting than a young drunk. If I think of something I'll let you know. For a second I wonder if the way this six-four pipsqueak's behaving tonight will affect how I call the close pitches when he begins his Major League career next season. I also wonder fleetingly if this kid will ever *have* a Major League career.

Steve turns to skinny Lane. "Have you and Abbott been together all evening?"

"Sure."

"Abbott was never out of your sight?"

"Well, he was out of my sight—I mean, he went to the john a coupla times and so did I, but it was only for a few minutes."

A few minutes, of course, are enough.

Later Billy Lane takes me aside to apologize for his partner's behavior. "He's just a big kid, Ed."

"I understand. How's it goin', Billy? I understand you had a pretty good year at the plate."

Lane laughs ruefully. "You couldna seen the final statistics, Ed. I was 1-6 pitching but had been hitting good, so they tried me as an outfielder. I did okay for a while, but ended up hitting .198! I'm quitting baseball and staying in the clothing business."

Meanwhile Steve Appleman has found himself another suspect. A dark, stocky, good-looking fellow named Arturo Spinelli. He's a fighter who regularly hangs out in The

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Empty Sulky. Turns out he admits he went to see Mal Carter that evening but says he left him alive. Also he denies he had an appointment with Carter.

"What did you talk about?" Steve asks.

Spinelli doesn't answer.

"Been takin' any more dives, kid?" says the bartender maliciously, and for his trouble he gets assaulted with a deadly weapon—Spinelli's fist. He spends a few moments sitting on the floor of the office, rubbing his Ruthian jaw.

"You really want to make trouble for yourself, don't you, Spinelli?" says Steve. He scratches his head and smiles a little slyly. "Don't I recall you had a fighting name other than plain Arturo Spinelli? What do they call you in the ring?"

The fighter's reply is barely audible. "Bambino," he says.

Soon after that Steve lets the suspects go, thus alleviating a strained situation. Everybody in the place has had his name and address taken down by one of Steve's colleagues, and several lines of investigation seem open; but Steve has nearly decided the "Babe Ruth" clue is a bust.

"It points equally to all three of them, Ed—the bartender, the ball player, and the prizefighter. I'll bet one of 'em is the murderer, but I don't think I'll ever be able to prove it."

"You've got plenty of Carter's record books. They may give you a lead, even if they are all in code. Anyhow, I think I know who 'Babe Ruth' is. That should help you see which direction to look."

Steve looks surprised. "You do?"

"I think so. I look at it this way: what kind of a guy was Mal Carter? A sneering, slimy, rotten, no-good villain, right?"

"That's a charitable description, but I'll buy it. I almost hate to find who killed him, but I will. So what's the point, Ed? Which of those three guys is 'Babe Ruth'?"

"Well, first I eliminate the bartender, Vince. He looks like Ruth, sure, but since when does a man make an appointment to see his own bartender? He sees him every night."

Steve nods. "That's a good point. Okay."

"Now the fighter is called the Bambino, and Babe Ruth was called the Bambino, but to go from Bambino to Babe Ruth for a nickname doesn't ring true. It's like the tail wagging the dog. Now if a guy was actually named Babe Ruth, which is unlikely, you might call him the Bambino, but—"

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"Okay, okay, I get it. Then it's Abbott, huh?"

"No. Look, Steve, for Carter to call Abbott, a coming home-run slugger, Babe Ruth would be a compliment, wouldn't it? Would it really be in character for a guy like Carter to use a complimentary nickname? Or wouldn't he be more likely to use a derisive nickname, a mocking one?"

Steve says, "A sarcastic one seems most likely, I guess. But you've eliminated everybody."

"Wrong! Steve, Babe Ruth was originally a left-handed pitcher for the Boston Red Sox, and he was a great pitcher, too. But he was such a fantastic *hitter* that they finally made him a fulltime outfielder so he could play every day. Billy Lane, Abbott's partner in the clothing business, was a lefty pitcher who became an outfielder, too. The only difference between him and Babe Ruth was that Lane *failed* at both.

"Can't you imagine Mal Carter taunting Billy by calling him Babe Ruth? I can see Billy sitting here, probably discussing some peccadillo of his that Carter could use to ruin him in this city—involving gambling, dope, who knows what? Probably Carter was asking for a share of Billy's profits from the clothing business in exchange for his silence. On top of everything else, he's rubbing into Billy the code name he's come up with for him—Babe Ruth, the ballplayer who could do anything, for Billy Lane, the ballplayer who failed at everything. Just the sort of irony a creep like Mal Carter would have found hilarious.

"Billy can't take any more, so he kills him. With a gun he brought for the purpose, or with Carter's own gun, premeditated or not. I can't tell about those things—you'll find them out soon enough, I guess. And even if Billy notices the name 'Babe Ruth' written in the appointment book, it never even occurs to him anybody could imagine that as referring to him, so he leaves it there. Steve, I'm convinced that was the way it was. But, by golly, I hope you never pin it on him!"

My friend Steve is too good a cop to live up to that hope. If you follow baseball closely, you know that Frank Abbott has been named rookie-of-the-year—34 homers and 90 RBI's, plus comparison with Babe Ruth, premature I think. But you probably don't know that Billy Lane was 12-2 and hit .412 for *his* team—he's said to be the best ballplayer in State Prison history, even though the *Sporting News* hasn't noted it.

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a NEW crime NOVELET by

NEDRA TYRE

Meet Francesca, the last of the Franklinds, a family known in the South for its fine manners, strict upbringing, excellent taste, and bountiful hospitality—a family with the closest ties of blood and tradition . . . Years had passed since the Franklinds of Oak Grove had welcomed and entertained a guest, especially a stranger. So Francesca, after a shameful beginning, knew she had to make amends . . .

THE STRANGER WHO CAME KNOCKING

by NEDRA TYRE

Francesca Franklind had just returned to the house after burying her sister Henrietta. The exertion had tired her and she was breathing heavily. She slid the shovel beneath the back steps. Clay from the neat narrow grave clung to her stout and sensible shoes. The Bible from which she had read the burial service bulged the right pocket of her lightweight coat and a thin volume of Emily Dickinson's poems made the left pocket gape.

She was all alone at Oak Grove now. For the first time in their history the extensive grounds and huge Greek revival house sheltered only one Franklind. Perhaps she ought to be shedding tears for her dead sister. But all she wanted now was a pot of strong tea, with lots of lemon and plenty of sugar. She needed to catch her breath, and as soon as she had made the tea she would take it out on the west porch and drink it as she watched the sun go down.

But she did not go to the kitchen to put the kettle on. Something impelled her to walk down the long hall that split the main part of the house in two. At the front door she paused and was startled to see a man

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approaching the house.

He appeared to be far off, but the alley of oaks that stretched straight ahead for more than a mile had always distorted distance.

The man seemed confident. He walked neither fast nor slow and Francesca watched him with the curiosity of a child.

He must have seen her staring at him, but his pace neither slackened nor quickened. Only when he had mounted the steps and was within reach of the front door did he say, "Good afternoon." He did not wait for her to greet him, but asked, "Is Miss Henrietta Franklind in?"

No casual, uninvited caller ever came to Oak Grove. In fact, no one ever called any more, and even in the years when there had been visitors no one had ever asked for Henrietta.

"She isn't here," Francesca said.

"When do you expect her back?"

"I don't know."

"I see. Well, thank you."

He turned, went back down the steps, and resumed his confident pace, neither fast nor slow.

Her hospitality had grown rusty. Where were her manners? When a stranger appeared at your door you welcomed him and led him into the parlor, learned the purpose of his visit, and made conversation. In summer you asked if he would like some lemonade or iced tea, in winter you offered coffee or sherry, served with tiny sandwiches or pastry or cake.

Shame over her lapsed cordiality gave way to consternation over the man's sudden appearance. Why on earth would a man arrive at the front door only minutes after she had buried Henrietta? Was Providence twitting her for her crime and trying to scare the daylights out of her?

She wouldn't think of that now. She would make the tea.

She took off her shoes and set them on the back porch so that the clay from Henrietta's grave would dry. She reproached herself when she saw the tracks she had made on the waxed floor of the hall, but she did not mop them up. She thought of returning the book of poems to its accustomed place on the bedside table in Henrietta's room; but the distance was too far to the small back room in the east wing which Henrietta had insisted on having for her own when she could have had any of a half-dozen large bedrooms with views of the river and countryside that had delighted Franklinds for generations. At

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least Francesca could put the Bible where it belonged on the desk in the library. But she decided against even that slight effort; the poetry and Bible could wait until she had drunk her tea.

She was tired and had earned some rest after burying her sister. Henrietta hadn't weighed much—she was really nothing but skin and bones—and the ground wasn't hard and resistant to digging; but Francesca would be 83 her next birthday and she wasn't as strong as she had been. Not that anything was wrong with her—she couldn't remember her last sick day. Good health was her greatest blessing; once she had got through the round of childhood diseases she hadn't spent a single day in bed.

The last week had simply been too much, that was all. First, there had been that devastating telephone call from someone claiming to be kin and saying her name was Joy. What sort of name was Joy? Why couldn't she have been called Elizabeth or Sarah or Martha or Josephine? Faith was a good honest name and so were Hope and Charity; but whoever heard of anybody being named Joy?

Francesca and Henrietta had almost jumped out of their skins when the telephone rang—something it hadn't done in years. Henrietta had scampered to her room, as if a caller were at the door about to burst in and carry her off; and Francesca had to ask Joy to repeat what she had said. Joy wanted to come down to Oak Grove to be married on the east lawn.

Who was Joy? What claim did she have to the east lawn? Francesca wondered but was too polite to ask point-blank, and then Joy shouted her credentials. She was the granddaughter of Francesca's first cousin, the one who had moved to New York in 1910. Fifty years must have passed since Francesca had as much as had a Christmas card from that cousin; but family ties were binding and Francesca had said yes, though the east lawn, as the girl called it, was now as overgrown and full of brambles as the castle grounds of Sleeping Beauty. She told the girl so, but the conditions of the grounds didn't matter to Joy.

Henrietta emerged trembling from her upstairs hideout to get Francesca's account of what had happened. "Well, of course, precious," Henrietta said when Francesca told her of Joy's request, "you had to say yes. Family ties and family feeling are binding. You couldn't have refused, sugar."

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Precious, sugar, sugar lump, darling, beloved—that was how every girl and woman in the family had always addressed the other; if anyone was ever called dear it was given and received as a reprimand.

"But, darling," Francesca asked, "will you be able to manage?"

Henrietta was a recluse and had lived shut off, from all contact with outsiders ever since she had returned from her mysterious venture years before.

"Precious, of course. I'll just take my food and stay in the attic until it's all over. Don't you bother the least little bit over me, sugar."

Henrietta was so sweet, so gentle. She read her life away in the library or took long walks in the woods. Every now and then she was a little willful and forgetful and would bring herbs and roots and wild flowers into the kitchen and Francesca would mildly scold her, "Precious, those things mess up my nice kitchen"; and Henrietta would smile that sweet smile of hers and say, "Sorry, darling," and toss it all into the garbage can.

Henrietta had barely barricaded herself in the attic when the invasion of Joy's contingent began. To Francesca, in the thick of the commotion, it was a complete three-ring circus.

First came an advance man, with a coterie of advisers and notetakers, to survey the downstairs of the house and the grounds. Next a fleet of trucks, trailers, and station wagons arrived to disgorge supervisors and workers. All labored as frantically on the lawns and grounds as if they were being lashed by overseers, and when they had finished mowing, clipping, pruning, and spraying they dragged out pots of blooming flowers from a florist's van and set them about the landscape. No one said as much as kiss-my-foot to Francesca. The best way to describe it all to Henrietta, once Oak Grove was rid of these intruders, would be to tell her it was as if Mongolian hordes, Vandals and Visigoths, had swept down and seized complete control.

On the day of the wedding the caterers appeared bringing their own mobile kitchen. Festive tents were set up. A small orchestra was assembled. Then the wedding party and guests arrived, and the only way Francesca knew which one was Joy was because she was the only one wearing a veil. At last, seconds before the procession began, Joy asked if she could see Miss Franklind. Francesca approached her and could not

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keep from staring. Every single Franklind feature had been bred out of Joy. And imagine having to ask to see your hostess and not recognizing your own kin when you were facing her! It was more than Francesca could bear, so she presented herself as the housekeeper and said that Miss Franklind had been unexpectedly called away because of an emergency.

"Tell her, please," Joy had said, "that she has made the happiest day of my life even happier by lending me Oak Grove." It was a sweet thing to say and it touched Francesca; but it didn't make up for all the hullabaloo.

Then it was over. The circus had ended. The magician had waved his wand and everything was whisked away. Francesca had to give them credit. They certainly cleaned up after themselves. Not a trace was left of their invasion and occupation except that the grounds had been cleared and the shrubbery trimmed.

The last station wagon was hardly out of sight when Francesca rushed up the stairs to the attic and called out, "Precious, they've left. You can come out now."

But Henrietta did not appear and Francesca called out more loudly, "Darling, they're gone!"

Francesca pushed open the door and gasped to see Henrietta lying flat on her back on the floor. Her books and provisions were stacked neatly on a small table and looked untouched. She must have died soon after she had gone to the attic.

She did not look at peace. That sweet expression she'd had since childhood had left her face, which now wore a grimace, as if death had put her out of temper. Her hand clasped a pencil and beside her was a note, not in the neat handwriting that had drawn praise all her life (those graceful loops, those beautifully symmetrical t-bars and carefully formed m's and n's that no one could mistake for w's and u's) but in a loose haphazard scrawl.

"Francesca," the note began — not the usual darling or precious or sugar lump — "I hold you to your promise. And whatever you do, *don't ea*—" she had underlined *don't ea* and then in the last second of time left to her she had been so exhausted that whatever Francesca must not do was lost forever. Death had grown impatient and would not wait for Henrietta to finish her last message.

Her sister's dying agitation grieved Francesca. For years she had given Henrietta her solemn

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promise that Henrietta would be buried in the old family plot, but that reassurance had not been enough and in Henrietta's last agony she had felt compelled to remind her.

Henrietta had had no one to comfort her in her last moments, and it bothered Francesca to think that in her extremity Henrietta was concerned that she might break her promise. She must have realized that she was dying since she had tried to write a note. Perhaps she had cried out for help, but in all the clamor of the wedding preparations she had gone unheard.

Henrietta must have been dead for several days and there was no time to mourn and lament or to be sorry that she had died without a loved one to cling to and to close her eyes. She must be got into her grave at once. The task was strenuous and would require all Francesca's strength. Tears and regrets must be postponed.

Using a small hand cart that once had been farm equipment when Oak Grove was under cultivation, Francesca trundled her dead sister to the exact spot Henrietta had chosen long ago. "Here, precious, is where I want to be," Henrietta had instructed, pointing directly behind the listing slab engraved: *Sacred to the Memory of Elijah Nathanael Franklind Who Departed This Life on June 12, 1851, Aged 91 years, 11 Months and 3 Days.*

And that was where she buried Henrietta. After reading the service for the dead and a poem by Emily Dickinson and saying a short prayer, Francesca had walked back to the house, only to see the stranger appear and hear him ask for Henrietta.

And Francesca had lied to him.

One doesn't lie. It was the ultimate sin, worse to a Franklind than theft. It wasn't even called a lie—a word too searing for a Franklind to utter. You have told an untruth was the way one Franklind accused another.

She would not allow herself to be branded a liar. She had told the man that Henrietta wasn't there. It was God's truth that she wasn't. But she had told him she didn't know when Henrietta would be back. That had been a lie. Because Henrietta would never be back.

But the man would be back. Francesca was sure of it. The man would be back and again he would ask for Henrietta.

How could Francesca extricate herself when he reappeared?

She could draw on his sympathy, complain of her age and infirmity, admit she was alone and had been afraid to

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admit her aloneness to a stranger.

Or she could persist. Telling another untruth was not much worse than telling the first one. She could compound her lie. She could say that Henrietta was still away, that Henrietta had a mind of her own and did as her whims commanded, that she came and left as she pleased and did not match her doings with the calendar.

But no rehearsal was possible. There was no need to addle her brain over what she might say. When the man returned she would act as she must. The occasion would dictate her behavior.

As the days passed, Francesca barely missed Henrietta. Since Ann, their last sister, had died 15 years before, Francesca and Henrietta had each gone her own way, done her own cooking, spent the time as she liked. Henrietta had made long excursions in the woods or spent the day in the library reading herself through the entire collection, book by book and shelf by shelf. Francesca preferred her main meal in the middle of the day; Henrietta from the time she had returned from her stay in the East had brought back a Yankee habit and wanted her dinner at night. Francesca was vigorously occupied keeping the large house cleaned and waxed and polished and working in the rose garden and sweeping the alley of oaks in front of the house.

On occasion Henrietta had offered to help with the housework, but give her a dustcloth and she simply sat and held it; hand her a mop and she merely leaned against it. Suggest that she cut some roses and all she did was go from one bush to another smelling the blossoms. The sisters talked very little, yet each felt completely at ease with the other, and cherished. Living in seclusion as they did, it was as if they were the only two passengers on a ship bound for eternity.

Francesca's unorthodox disposal of Henrietta's body bothered her only slightly. She realized that in a strict sense it was a crime. She knew there were laws and penalties for not reporting a death. But she felt that the very makers of those laws would gladly have suspended them if they had known what a private person Henrietta was and how she dreaded any sort of intrusion. It would have been a sacrilege to give Henrietta's body over to a stranger's hands and ministrations.

But of course the real reason she had buried Henrietta was that Henrietta had insisted on

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it—made her swear on the Bible that she would; and as if the vow were a promissory note that regularly came due, Henrietta had made Francesca swear it at least once a month. And it really hadn't been any trouble.

If only Henrietta's life had been happier. Yet, come to think of it, she had led the life of all the Franklind girls. But something was lacking.

Perhaps it all went back to her teacakes.

If only the family had eaten Henrietta's teacakes!

Because something had happened to Henrietta to make her efface herself. As a child and girl and young woman, before she went away from home, she had enjoyed company; even if she didn't say anything she smiled, nodded her head in agreement, responded in her gentle quiet fashion. But home hadn't satisfied her and she had felt forced to leave. It created a stir all right, as no Franklind girl—though Henrietta wasn't exactly a girl when she went away—had ever left home except to make her own home; but Henrietta was bound and determined to go.

What she had met with in the outside world during that year she was away, heaven only knew; for once she returned she refused to see anyone, even avoided her own flesh and blood, and seemed not to grieve over deaths in the family because that meant one less person to evade.

The precious little thing! Maybe it would all have been different if Henrietta, the youngest of six sisters, had felt she was needed or if she had had a gift for something. But she had no talent for anything. She couldn't sew or embroider—a briarstitch and a buttonhole stitch were one and the same to her; and her delicate little fingers struck only discords when Miss Ariadne Maxon, the music teacher, came out from town to give all the Franklind sisters lessons. The only special inclination Henrietta ever seemed to have was to make teacakes.

She spent hours in the kitchen, her little pink rosebud of a face turning bright red as she hovered at the oven waiting for her teacakes to bake. Her generous little heart! She made teacakes for everyone on every possibly occasion—and no one would eat them. After the first swallow no one ever tried again. The best of butter and sugar and flour went into them, yet they tasted like warmed-over sand. And it must have broken Henrietta's heart to meet with rejection after rejection, Francesca was thinking—not even

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the chickens or pigs would touch Henrietta's teacakes.

Why wouldn't the family eat her teacakes? Where was their family feeling? Well, of course Franklinds never had been ones to eat things that crumbled and crunched; they liked things you could bite down on, but their lack of feeling had thrust Henrietta out into a world for whose callousness she was not prepared.

The world had taken cruel hold of Henrietta and had broken her like the fragile porcelain doll she was, and she had come home to Oak Grove in utter defeat.

She must have offered her trusting heart to the first man she met. Unprotected by parents and brothers and sisters, who at Oak Grove had formed a whole regiment of guards to discourage unlikely suitors, Henrietta had probably fallen for an unworthy man who had promised her everything and given her nothing. She had been the victim of a philanderer who had twisted her around his little finger and all her high Franklind resolve had melted like wax.

The humiliation Henrietta had suffered made her a recluse, and in all the years that followed she had kept her wounds open by reading the charged poetry of Emily Dickinson and Christina Rossetti and Donne. There was nothing to sustain her but books and her long walks in the woods where she messed about with herbs and wild flowers.

Then at the very end the man had come to get down on his knees and beg forgiveness, but it had been too late . . .

Francesca's common sense stifled her speculations and memories. The man who had arrived just after Francesca had buried Henrietta certainly didn't look like a philanderer. If Henrietta's life had been destroyed by an unhappy love, that man seemed unlikely to have been the lover.

Blast the stranger! Why didn't he return and show himself in his true colors? She was tired of worrying about him. He must come back.

In her rigorous cleaning routine Francesca began to neglect the back of the house and the upstairs. She spent all her time tidying the front. The reception room, the parlor, the library and front hall were as shining and polished as if royalty were expected because Francesca did not want to run the risk of being in the back or upstairs and not hear him when he returned.

Her precautions were justified, for on the afternoon he did return she was in the ideal

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spot. She was polishing the brass knob of the front door when she looked down the long alley of oaks and saw him walking toward the house. She had plenty of time to put away the polish and the cloth and to rinse her hands and go to the parlor and sit down and wait for him to knock.

When the knock sounded she rose slowly and walked to the front door. The smile she and all her sisters had been trained to wear when they greeted guests automatically appeared.

"Good afternoon," she said. "Won't you come in?"

He followed her inside as if he had an engraved invitation in his hand and had been summoned formally to a diplomatic reception. That was too elaborate a way to describe it, Francesca decided; he followed her into the front parlor as if she were Mary and he were Mary's little lamb.

When she invited him to be seated he slipped down into one of the Belter chairs and looked to be barely off the floor; his knees almost met his chin. Francesca was perched high on an Empire sofa like the Empress of China giving an audience. Such a gaping difference in their situations must be corrected, so she moved from the sofa to another Belter chair opposite him. Now she had to look up slightly to meet his gaze.

She realized then that though he was not young he was much younger than Henrietta, and however rashly Henrietta may have given her heart it would not have been to a younger man.

"May I see Miss Henrietta Franklind?" he asked.

No doubt he had inferred from Francesca's welcome that her sister had returned.

"I'm afraid I lied to you the other day," she said. "I must beg your forgiveness. Henrietta wasn't in—that was true. But only part of the truth. Henrietta is dead."

He was not a person who showed emotion. Anyway, her news did not grieve him. Instead he looked slightly disappointed—or did his raised eyebrows signify annoyance?

"I had just buried her," Francesca went on, and then took a quick intake of breath. She need not have been quite so candid, though he obviously was not taking the remark as starkly literally as she had put it.

"For so many years we had shared this house and suddenly I was alone at Oak Grove, miles from any neighbor. I didn't want to admit my aloneness to a stranger."

The least he could have done

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was to express sympathy for her loss. But nothing would drag a statement from him. He began to look out of the window. He seemed to be deliberating. He shuffled his feet and his hands rubbed the chair arms. She was alarmed that he was about to push himself up and leave. Years of practicing the strictest etiquette toward guests—all the childhood drilling she had received from her parents and aunts and grandmothers—were jettisoned. She intended to ask personal and direct questions of a guest.

"Were you a friend of my sister?"

"No."

His curt answer shocked her.

"Then I don't understand. You must have come many miles to visit her."

"It's difficult to explain, and now that she's dead the reason I came no longer matters." His voice had the sensible, even tone of logic, but his face showed the disappointment of a child who has been promised something and has learned that the promise will not be kept.

"I must apologize for prying. But a moment ago you said you weren't a friend of my sister. If you weren't her friend, then why did you come to visit her?"

"She invited me."

Ever since Henrietta had returned to Oak Grove she had bolted at the sight of anyone except members of the family. In the last ten years she had set eyes on no one except Francesca. It was fantastic to believe that she had *invited* anyone to visit her. The man must be a liar.

"You say Henrietta wasn't your friend, but there must have been something very special about your relationship if she invited you to come here."

The man made no comment. His hands began to rub the arms of the chair again. Then what she most dreaded happened—he rose from the chair and said, "I must be going."

Francesca held her breath. She had to contrive a reason to delay him until she found out why he was there.

"Stay for a little while," she said. "So few people come here—we're so far off the beaten track. It's good to have company. Please stay a little longer." She hadn't used that simpering coquettish tone since she was a young girl. It surprised her to see that it still worked, for he settled back into the chair.

"You must forgive me," she said. "But I don't remember your name."

He had not told her his name. She had a perfect

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memory for names. He stared at her as if to say that he hadn't given her his name. He acted like the gnome in the fairy story who would not have his name pried from him. At last he said, "Williams."

"Is your family here with you, Mr. Williams?"

"I have no family," he said.

"Have you often seen my sister?"

"I talked to her only once."

"Only once?"

Her repetition demanded an explanation. Even he was willing to acknowledge that. He said, "She didn't seem to know what I was talking about."

His explanation made a stalemate of all her efforts. None of her questions had elicited any information. She must accept defeat.

He looked at his watch and pulled an envelope from his pocket to consult some figures jotted there. "The next bus is due at the crossroads in an hour. It must be about two miles from here. I can walk the distance in thirty minutes easily. Meantime, I wonder if I may have a cup of coffee."

He was apologetic. He might have been throwing himself on her mercy.

It humiliated her that a guest at Oak Grove had to ask for refreshment. What a shambles she had made of the Franklind reputation for hospitality by neglecting a guest's needs so that he was forced to ask for something to drink.

"Of course. If you'll excuse me for a minute or two. Please make yourself at home. Maybe you'd like to walk in the rose garden or browse in the library while I make the coffee."

"Thank you, I'm very comfortable here."

In the kitchen she put the percolator on. If only she had something sweet to offer him. It was so inhospitable to serve a guest nothing but a cup of coffee. Her own available fare was Spartan and there wasn't time to bake anything. Maybe some delicacy had been left over from the wedding. Perhaps the caterers had not taken everything away. She hadn't spent much time in the kitchen since the wedding entourage had left, and had done no thorough cleaning there for fear that she might not be at the front when Mr. Williams returned. How futile all that seemed now that he had reappeared and all her prodding and prying had evoked nothing about Henrietta.

She searched in the cupboards and shelves until the coffee was ready, but she found nothing. She would simply have to admit that sad days indeed had come to Oak Grove when

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an afternoon coffee tray could hold nothing but coffee. At least Mr. Williams must have the best china. She went to the pantry and on the shelf below the Meissen cups and saucers she saw a small square box tied with a ribbon. It was almost as if a genie had set it there.

The caterers had left some of their goodies after all. No doubt a piece of the wedding cake was in the box. The ribbon tore as her eager fingers untied it, and she giggled like a pleased child to see that the box held six small cookies. She crumbled one and sniffed at it to make sure it was fresh, and when its condition satisfied her she placed the other five cookies on a silver dish. Franklind hospitality may have reached a low point, but at least a guest would be given something with his coffee. She hummed as she poured the coffee from the percolator into a silver pot.

Mr. Williams relished the cookies and took a second cup of coffee. He smiled and complimented Francesca on the coffee and cookies. Between bites and sips he complimented her on the house and its setting and on the parlor furniture and the portraits and paintings. He kept up a continuous, almost artificial stream of chatter as if he did not want to be interrupted or have the conversation steered by Francesca; and then he said he must be going.

She went with him to the front door and wished him a good journey and recalled how she had craved this visit and had refused to go about her normal day's routine for fear she might miss Mr. Williams. But for all the satisfaction he had brought her he might as well not have returned.

She went back to the parlor and picked up the tray. At least Mr. Williams had enjoyed the coffee enough to have a second cup, and no crumb of the cookies was left. Her intention had been to take the tray to the kitchen, but instead of walking down the hall she went back to the front door.

Mr. Williams' pace was slow. He had walked only a short distance down the alley of oaks. At that rate he might miss his bus. He glanced around and then stopped to look at the trees. Their sturdy beauty had delighted generations of Franklinds and their visitors, and it pleased Francesca that they also seemed to impress Mr. Williams.

Then he suddenly turned around so that he gazed directly at her, and she stepped back startled. Once goodbyes were said, a hostess did not peer after a departing guest. She was sure she was hidden by the shadows

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in the front hall, and yet it was as if her glance and Mr. Williams' were locked. She might still be trying to elicit the reason for his call, and he might be questioning why fate had made it impossible for him to see Henrietta. Then he turned resolutely and resumed his walking. He stumbled slightly, but regained his balance.

Francesca chided herself for spying, then carried the tray to the kitchen.

She turned on the water in the sink and her apprehension was exactly as it was in the days when she had been waiting for Mr. Williams to return. She had been afraid then that the sound of running water might blur or muffle his approaching steps. She turned off the water and hurried to the front door to check on Mr. Williams' progress. He was now out of sight. He was a good walker, she could say that for him.

Why had he lied that Henrietta had invited him to Oak Grove? Well, she would never know. She had not wanted anything in life except the days as they were given to her; she thought one was a poor guest of life to demand things of it. At that moment it seemed that all the passion and ambition that had been lacking in her bland existence had now gathered with the compound interest of 83 years. Nothing mattered except to learn why Mr. Williams had appeared from God-knew-where and had disappeared into God-knew-where. She must rush after him. Somehow she must catch up with him and beg him to satisfy her longing to know what lay behind his two visits to Oak Grove.

She subdued her wild and foolish impulse and decided to prepare an early, very light supper. She opened a can of chicken soup and when it was hot she poured it into a bowl. As always she set a proper place for herself in the dining room. She raised the first spoonful of soup to her mouth, then set the untouched spoonful back into the bowl.

Her hands were trembling.

Mr. Williams, no matter how fast his pace had become, could not have disappeared so quickly down the oak alley! She had watched him hesitate, then start again. Moments later she had looked and there was no sign of him and she had assumed that he had walked beyond her vision. But in so short a time that would be impossible.

He must have left the alley and was now in the surrounding thicket. He was lurking there, waiting for the dark, and then he would come back. He meant to harm her.

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He was waiting until she felt safe and secure and then he would sneak into the house and kill her.

It was useless to go to the front door and lock it or try to secure the back door. The dining room, with its five floor-length windows and two doors that couldn't be locked opening into the side porch, was an open invitation to Mr. Williams to enter whenever he chose.

Francesca scurried from the dining room across the wide hall into the library. There was only one door to barricade there and she pushed a heavy chair against it. She did not know whether to turn on all the lights or to wait in the dark. She walked over to the fireplace and picked up the poker, and then she went to the desk and took a sharp letter opener from the middle drawer.

She laid these two improvised weapons on the sofa beside her and waited for Mr. Williams.

Francesca had kept too many death watches and had done too much nighttime nursing of sick relatives to be tempted to sleep. She sat ramrod-straight on the sofa as the hours eked away. She felt annoyed that Mr. Williams was delaying his move. She knew beyond doubt that he was somewhere on the grounds. Once she was almost tempted to go to the front porch and yell an invitation to him to come inside and get on with it; she was tired of his shillyshallying. She liked definite, purposeful people, not tight-mouthed strangers who called and refused to state their purpose and then said a sham goodbye, only to lurk in the dark before doing harm.

To add to her dismay she suddenly realized she was hungry. It was a pity she had not eaten her soup; by now it had long since coagulated in the bowl.

When daylight came, hunger and fatigue triumphed over fear and anxiety. She put the poker back and returned the letter opener to the desk drawer, then went into the kitchen and poached two eggs and made coffee.

She looked with misgivings at the sink, still filled with the cup and saucer and silver coffee pot she had used to serve Mr. Williams. The long generations of Oak Grove mistresses would have deplored such slatternly ways. But at the moment dirty china and silver did not seem important; she had other things to attend to.

Decades before, the wide lane the Franklinds called an alley, linking the house with a

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side road, had had a hard surface put on it; but no one in the family had liked its artificiality, and as the surface had worn away it had not been replaced. Now it was mostly sand and she would have no difficulty finding Mr. Williams' footprints in it. If they led to the side road that finally joined the main highway, then Mr. Williams had gone on his way and she had been a great fool. Her only real loss would be a night's sleep, added to the chagrin of having to admit that she was senile and hysterical to have whipped her suspicions to such a pitch.

As she had assumed, his footprints proved easy to track. His stride was long. She saw where he had stopped and turned, and she recalled that this was the spot where she thought he could see her watching him. Then he turned and resumed his walking. Not long afterward he had stumbled. The sand recorded it all. The stumble must have shaken him. Afterward his stride grew shorter and the prints were not so deep.

On a stretch of hard surface the prints disappeared and she could not find them again. Something in the brambles must have caught his attention. No, of course not. This would have been the place where he decided to leave the oak alley and sneak back to the house by way of the thickets and fields.

As she looked around wondering which specific route Mr. Williams had taken, she saw him lying on his back in the ditch. His right hand was extended toward her as if he were gesturing to her to come help him.

She called his name and rushed over to him and took his proffered hand. Even a glance revealed that he was dead. She stood over him with no idea of what to do. She ought to summon someone, but there was no one to whom she could appeal. Oak Grove was isolated.

Perhaps she could telephone for a doctor, but since Dr. Sanderson had died 15 years before, she had not been acquainted with one. Anyway, Mr. Williams was far beyond the need of a doctor. And whatever she did, she must not telephone the police. No policeman had ever set foot either in the house or on the grounds at Oak Grove. No Franklind had ever had need of an officer of the law, and the sole survivor was not going to tarnish the family name at this late date. She had too much family pride for that.

Yet the dead must be ministered to, and Mr. Williams could not lie sprawled like that in the ditch. After all he was,

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though in extremely awkward circumstances, a Franklind guest.

He was obviously a man from some far-off place. No person who trilled his r's and uttered such pronounced g's ever started out in life below the Mason-Dixon line. She felt as if she were desecrating his person, but she must search his pockets for anything that would identify him and indicate his next of kin. She blanched over searching a stranger's pockets, but she did the work thoroughly and extracted several envelopes from his inside pockets and a billfold from his hip pocket.

Francesca's far vision was excellent, but she needed glasses to read print and her glasses were lying on the kitchen table. She hesitated to leave a guest in Mr. Williams' predicament, but she had no choice.

She hurried to the kitchen and when she had put on the glasses she went into the library and began to inspect the envelopes and billfold. One envelope contained a bus ticket. The destination stamped on it was blurred; but it would make no difference now, as whatever his destination might be he could not get there by bus.

She set the ticket aside and picked up another envelope. The original address had been crossed out and another added, and the second address had also been crossed out. The third address had obviously reached Mr. Williams as the letter was in his possession. Franklind ethics did not allow one to read someone else's mail uninvited. But the present situation, she reminded herself, was beyond manners and deportment; and with no further remorse she pulled the letter out of the envelope.

The handwriting was familiar. Its sharp precision stabbed at her eyes.

"Dear Mr. Williams," she read. "I doubt that this will reach you as I can only use the address you had many years ago when you had your first job. But if by chance you should ever come South you might like to talk with me about Louise Shaw, Mortimer Gladwyn, Natasha Brown, Mildred Lance, and several others whose names you may not know. Oak Grove, where I live, used to be famous for its hospitality, but things have greatly changed, and I am sorry not to be able to offer you a meal, much less a place to stay. However, we can have some light refreshments. So if you should come, it would be best for you to arrive in the late afternoon around teatime. I enclose a rough map to show you how to get to Oak Grove

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once you arrive in Lexington, the nearest town."

Mr. Williams had spoken the truth—Henrietta had invited him to Oak Grove. But who on earth were all those people she mentioned? Francesca had never heard of a single one of them. She was sure they had never lived in the county or even in the state.

The last envelope contained what at first appeared to be fragments of dead leaves until she looked more closely and saw they were bits and pieces of an old newspaper clipping. She fished out some particles and the words dissolved in her hand even as she tried to read them. *MUR OR ACCIDENT D THS?* Her breath sent some bits skittering across the desk and when she reached for them they disintegrated. Mr. Williams had obviously set store by the clipping but its shattered fragments meant nothing to her.

Nothing she had so far found was of any real help. No doubt Mr. Williams' full name and address would be in his billfold. When she opened it she was relieved to see a card bearing the name Allin Williams. What a strange way to spell Allen! Of course Mr. Williams was welcome to spell his first name any way he pleased, and besides, she was a fine one to question the way anybody spelled his name, since no one was willing to believe there was such a name as Franklind, when it was pronounced exactly as if it had no final d.

She looked again at the card. Allin Williams, Captain (Retired), Homicide Department. A city and state were listed.

How strange! Only instants before she had prided herself that no policeman had ever been at Oak Grove. Heaven was punishing her for such vanity. Not only had a policeman visited Oak Grove but his dead body was now lying in the alley ditch.

There was no other information on the card, neither home address nor next of kin, and then she recalled that he had said he had no family.

What possible connection could Henrietta have had with a detective? Why would she invite Mr. Williams to Oak Grove? He had said he talked with Henrietta only once, and yet a note from Henrietta sent many years later had him chasing South as soon as Henrietta's letter had caught up with him. Obviously it would have to be about an unsolved case and Mr. Williams must have talked with Henrietta about it for some reason or other. Maybe poor darling sweet Henrietta had been a witness to something

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and had refused to betray anyone's guilt, and now after years of silence had thought it best to set things straight.

Then a physical weakness that Francesca had never felt before overwhelmed her. She had to push herself up from the chair and support herself by grasping at furniture and leaning against the walls until she reached the pantry. The box from which she had taken the cookies was still there, and the ribbon was beside it. No wonder the ribbon had come apart in Francesca's hands. She saw that it had been worn to tatters. It was one that had once been laced in the trimming of a petticoat.

The cookie she had crumbled to test its freshness was still in the box and had nothing to do with Joy's wedding refreshments. It was one of Henrietta's teacakes. She ought to have recognized them at once even though they were smaller and thicker than the ones Henrietta used to make when she pestered everyone in the family with them.

But their taste must have changed along with their shape, as Mr. Williams had obviously relished them.

And had been poisoned to death by them.

Disgrace must not come at this late date to the Franklinds. Francesca had no intention of being the means by which scandal and ruin would descend on the Franklind family. She knew in her heart that Mr. Williams would not have wanted it either. He was a true gentleman. Delicacy had prevented him from speaking ill o the dead. He had not even intimated that he had suspected Henrietta of having committed murder.

Of having committed *murders!*

How easy it would have been for him, a detective practised in such matters, adept at third degree, to interrogate Francesca about all those people mentioned in Henrietta's letter to him. His desire to know the truth had brought him a long distance. But when Francesca had told him Henrietta was dead he had enough tact and feeling to leave it there.

Francesca was to blame for Mr. Williams' death. She had been Henrietta's accomplice. Family feeling had its part, too. She ought not to have been so vaunted by Franklind pride that she couldn't offer a guest coffee without some tidbit to accompany it.

Now it was clear that Henrietta's troubled features in death were caused by worry that Francesca might eat the cookies she had prepared for

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Mr. Williams—the half-finished *Don't ea* was an attempted warning to Francesca. Apparently it had seemed all right to Henrietta to send poor Mr. Williams and all those other people to kingdom come, but she had a strong feeling against poisoning her own flesh and blood.

That really hadn't been nice of Henrietta and no way at all to treat a guest—to plan to kill him with poisoned cookies after she had admitted having dispatched various others in the same way. Henrietta had had a streak of meanness in her that no one except Mr. Williams had ever suspected. To think that her precious, darling, her shy baby sister had been a mass murderer! Scared of her own shadow and skittish at the approach of anyone, whether friend, kin, or stranger—yet able to poison mere acquaintances without batting an eye!

But Henrietta's most unforgivable act was inviting Mr. Williams to Oak Grove for the express purpose of killing him.

All Oak Grove's hostesses since the house had first opened its doors to visitors in 1824 would have hung their heads in shame over such rude treatment of a guest. Thank God, none of the other Franklinds had lived to see this shameful day.

What was now required of Francesca was all too obvious.

Mr. Williams had no kin. He had said he was all alone. He had earned his final resting place beside Henrietta at Oak Grove.

Francesca must get on with what she had to do. She would get the hand cart and the shovel, and then when it was all over she would make herself a pot of strong tea and drink it with lots of lemon and sugar.

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A kind of "odd" detective story—what might be called "a curiosity of crime," blending the old and the new and spanning 125 years of police procedure and crime detection . . .

NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN

by J. F. PEIRCE

I waited for the explosion. When it didn't come, the silence seemed the more deafening.

Chief Inspector Haines was not one to take correction lightly. He had a self-confidence born of proved ability and the willingness to admit his mistakes. But there was a right way to correct him. It had to be done with proper respect. He was Number One in the department, a position he had earned as a result of hard work. He had been respectful of his superiors on the way up, and he demanded the same respect for himself now that he had reached the top. When the rare occasion arose that he did not receive the respect due him he exploded. But not this time.

We were attending one of the monthly meetings he had instituted to keep us abreast of new developments in criminology. On this occasion we had heard a lecture on computers given by a young civilian named Carter. His talk had been replete with references to punch cards, to readers that translate the punches in these cards into letters and numbers in so-called print outs, and to memory banks that store information on tapes to be retrieved whenever needed. According to young Carter, the computer was the answer to all of our problems of detection. We merely had to punch information into cards, insert them into the computer, touch a button, and the criminal would be ejected instantly into our hands. It seemed quite simple—and quite unbelievable.

Later, as we were having refreshments in the conference room, the Chief Inspector said, "There's nothing new under the sun—except new applications of old principles." The remark seemed to come out of the

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blue, to be apropos of nothing.

I was reminded of a couplet by Herrick: "There's nothing new: we walk where others went. There's no new vice now, but has its precedent."

It was then that Carter said, "That's where you're wrong, Inspector. There's a world of new ideas and inventions waiting to be discovered if you don't let your prejudices blind you to them."

I sat with a glass of ale poised halfway to my lips waiting for the explosion, but it didn't come. Instead, the Chief Inspector said mildly, "Perhaps you're right, young man," then picked up a folder and began to leaf through it, putting an end to conversation.

My teeth closed with an audible snap. Either the old boy's gone soft, I thought, or he's taken pity on the poor guy because of his youth or because he's not one of us. I should have known better. Neither of these reasons had ever stopped Haines from withering anyone on the vine before.

"For your benefit, Mr. Carter," he said, taking an old clipping from the folder, "it's my custom at these meetings to bring to the attention of my fellow officers not only the latest developments in the field of criminology but also cases from the past, to entertain and instruct them." He paused, then continued, "I'd like to read several clippings from the *Illustrated London News* of 1846 and 1847." He began to read and his voice was surprisingly soft for so big a man.

"Clifton Crewes, an itinerant musician who, with his employer, operated a monster, horse-drawn street organ, was shot and killed today in front of the Ministry of Defence. Crewes and his employer, Giovanni Pasavetti, are well-known throughout the metropolis. Wherever they went, and they went everywhere, the music of Rossini and Bellini swelled from their locomotive Brummagen organ, drawing huge crowds, setting children to dance in the streets, and causing fights between the proponents and opponents of the *orgue de Barbarie*. Recently the police were called to break up a near riot that resulted when the organ-grinders performed outside a military barracks. Thus, it can be seen that the operators of the Monster Street Organ were no strangers to violence. To-day violence touched one of them.

"This morning at eleven, the Great Organ, a product of the prolific manufactory of Gavioli, of Modena, and reputed to have cost upwards of £150, was

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drawn up in the vicinity of several of Her Majesty's ministries and a well-known conservatory of music. This territory had previously been claimed by a street band, a motley group of musicians—a harpist, a violinist, a horn-player, and a drummer—who were quickly drowned out by the resounding brass of the huge organ. Led by their conductor, 'Maestro' Wickes, the members of the street band approached the two organists and protested the usurpation of their territorial rights in a most vociferous manner. They were soon joined by Señor Cortes of the conservatory of music, who protested that the loud playing of the organ prevented him from hearing the performance of his students.

"Moments later, Mr. Merriam Penney, a secretary of the Ministry of Defence, added his voice to those raised in complaint, saying that a conference of much pith and moment to the nation had been brought to a veritable halt by the cacophony produced by the Monster Organ. Mr. Penney said that if the itinerant musicians did not cease and desist their profane performance, he would call a constable and lodge a formal charge of disturbing the peace against them.

"Still other voices were joined with these, including those of several street vendors whose cries of 'Come buy my pretty bow-pots!' and 'Cherry-ripe, ripe, ripe, I cry! Full and fair ones, come and buy!' had been drowned out by the bellowing of the mechanical monster.

"While Mr. Penney of the ministry remonstrated with Signor Pasavetti, Crewes was changing cylinders in the huge organ, which he then started to play. The result, according to witnesses, was an indescribable dissonance, as Crewes had apparently placed the cylinder incorrectly. Signor Pasavetti, fearing that the expensive machine might be irreparably damaged by its improper operation, broke off his discourse with Mr. Penney and rushed to assist his employe.

"What transpired thereafter is difficult to describe because of a general disagreement among the witnesses as to what they saw and heard. The only points on which there is no disagreement are that as Crewes was cranking the organ, he suddenly fell backward dead, blood spurting from his mouth, the shot that killed him having gone unheard because of the noise issuing from the organ. Pasavetti, who was as close as anyone to Crewes, unfortunately saw and heard nothing as he was trying to penetrate the

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bowels of the monster to ascertain what was wrong. His testimony is supported by that of Mr. Penney, who had followed him to continue his protestations.

"Part of the confusion on the part of the witnesses resulted from another disturbance that occurred simultaneously. Young Master Spokes of the band of street musicians, whose duty it was to pass the hat, was caught in the act of picking a gentleman's pocket. Constable Adams, one of several officers called to the scene, believes that the arrest of Master Spokes has solved a number of hitherto mysterious cases of theft from persons that have occurred in the area. It was evidently young Master Spokes's responsibility to solicit, not only voluntary, but involuntary contributions from those who stopped to listen to the band. The entire organization has been taken into custody and charged with suspicion of murder and grand theft, as the gentleman whose pocket was picked, a Russian named Igor Roskolnikov, was carrying in excess of £200 on his person. The musicians blame their downfall on automation, the aforementioned barrel-organ, with which they have been unable to compete.

"At this juncture, it is perhaps pertinent to describe the operation of a Monster Street Organ . . ."

The journalist was evidently paid by the word, for the article contained a detailed account of the operation and manufacture of barrel-organs, no doubt copied from some technical book on the subject. Barrel-organs get their name from the cylinder, or barrel, of the instrument, into which pins are inserted at intervals, according to the scheme of the music, to pick out the melody. These pins raise balanced keys that are connected by simple mechanisms to the valves of the organ's pipes, or reeds, opening them to admit a stream of air from the wind chest. The organ is operated by turning a crank, or handle.

The article concluded with the usual statement that though the murder weapon, a pistol, had not been found, the police were pursuing their investigation and that an arrest was considered imminent.

"Well, gentlemen," the Chief Inspector said when he finished reading, "what do you think? Who killed Crewes and why? What possible motives could there be for his murder?"

"Competition," Inspector Root suggested. "Fear of automation and resultant unemployment—a problem we're

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faced with today. Anyone in the band or all of them could be guilty."

"Jealousy," Brand said. "Señor Cortes could have been jealous of the street organ."

"Or angered by it," I added. "More than likely it offended his musical taste—or his soul." I remembered Hogarth's painting, The Enraged Musician, which shows a violinist at an open window, his hands held over his ears, in his anger at the crude noises made by a band of musicians outside.

"One of the street criers could have done it," Dandridge said, "because he couldn't be heard selling his wares."

"That's possible," I said. "I remember reading somewhere that the noise of city traffic has finally driven street peddlers to the suburbs."

The discussion grew general, and the Chief Inspector finally cut it off by taking another old clipping from the folder. "This is an even earlier article," he said, "on the General Post-office. I'll read only the part that's pertinent." Again he read softly.

"The sensation produced by the recent cases of letters being opened at the General Post-office, by the authority of the Secretary of State for the Home Department, has induced us to discover how it is done.

"Wafers are opened by the application of moisture, usually in the form of steam. Since this method is known to every housewife, it need not be discussed here. Sealed letters are opened thus: the letter is laid on an anvil with the seal up, a square of pure lead is then placed upon the seal, and the lead is struck with a hammer with considerable velocity, the sudden impact converting the soft lead into a seal as faithful as an electrotype. The letter is then opened by carefully removing the wax bit by bit. After the contents have been read and noted, the letter is re-sealed using the lead seal, which can be used for all other letters sealed similarly.

"Recently, a blunder by someone at the Post-office led to the disclosure of the government's exercise of this extraordinary power, although it has been well-known for years that, in small country towns, curious postmistresses have kept by them an assortment of seals to enable them to pry into their neighbours' secrets."

When the Chief Inspector finished reading, the rest of us looked at one another dumbly. Was this article related to the first one, and if so, how? Or was it intended merely to present additional information?

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The Chief Inspector gave us no clue. He secured a box from a corner of the room and carried it to the table. From it he took several objects: a music roll from an old-fashioned player piano; a round metal disc about 18 inches in diameter with holes punched in it that I recognized as a record for an antique music box; and a modern music box with glass sides that permitted the listener to observe how the pins in its brass barrel activated its comb to produce music.

It was young Carter who first saw the connection. He picked up one of the cards that he had used to illustrate his lecture on computers, then gestured with it toward the objects on the table. "They're like punch cards," he said. "The instrument's the reader, the music the print out."

The Chief Inspector smiled and took a third clipping from the folder. "This is a follow-up on the article about the murder," he said, and began to read slowly.

"The curious case of the murdered organ-grinder, reported in the last issue, was solved more as a result of a constable's curiosity than as a result of police procedure.

"As reported, Clifton Crewes—who with his employer, Giovanni Pasavetti, operated a monster, horse-drawn barrel-organ—was shot and killed in front of the Ministry of Defence after he had apparently inserted a musical cylinder incorrectly into the organ.

"Pasavetti and the other witnesses in the case—Mr. Merriam Penney of the ministry; Señor Cortes, the well-known music teacher and virtuoso; Igor Roskolnikov, the victim of a pickpocket; young Master Spokes, the alleged pickpocket; and his companions, a band of street musicians—were all taken to the station house. Constable Curtis Adams was left to protect the scene of the crime and the barrel-organ.

"Being of a mechanical bent and overcome by curiosity, the constable began to tinker with the monster machine to determine its *modus operandi.* Opening the organ to inspect its inner mechanism, he discovered the murder weapon, a pistol, where the murderer had hastily concealed it.

"After dispatching a street urchin to the station house to apprise his superior, Inspector Carnaby, of his discovery, Constable. Adams began his study of the inner workings of the organ. Being unable to discover any error in the placement of the cylinder that could account for the unseemly

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noise reported by witnesses, Constable Adams enlisted the assistance of one of the onlookers to crank the organ. The 'music' that emanated from it, he quickly realised, was suitable only for deaf or mechanical ears.

"As far as he could determine, there was no apparent rhyme or reason to the placement of the pins in the cylinder. Removing the cylinder, he replaced it with another, which produced excellent music—its volume, however, was painfully loud. He was trying to discover how to lower the volume when General Ormsby and Inspector Carnaby appeared. General Ormsby had come from the ministry to protest the resumption of the racket that was disturbing the defence conference, and Inspector Carnaby had come to collect the murder weapon and receive Constable Adams' report.

"The appearance of the general caused the good constable to realise the possible import of the organ's location. He showed the suspicious cylinder to the general and the inspector and suggested that it might be used to produce some sort of visual or audible Morse code. Both the general and the inspector were dubious of the constable's theory at first, but he was eloquent in its defence and not the least awed by the importance of his listeners. In the end, they were persuaded to let him put his theory to the test. A functionary of the ministry was called to guard the organ, and Constable Adams accompanied the general and the inspector to the station house.

"When Constable Adams confronted Signor Pasavetti with the weapon and the cylinder, Pasavetti at once confessed in order to clear himself of the possible charge of murder. Pasavetti testified that Crewes had been shot by Mr. Penney, who had then handed the gun to him to hide.

"According to the organ-grinder, he, Penney, and Roskolnikov are members of a foreign spy ring—Roskolnikov being the pay-off man, Pasavetti the pick-up man and courier, and Penney one of a number of informants in sensitive position—all of whom have since been apprehended.

"With his horse-drawn barrel-organ, Pasavetti could move freely about the city and countryside picking up information while seemingly in the innocent pursuit of his business. He could stop at ministries, embassies, and military installations without arousing suspicion. His informants could

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come to him to request a favourite tune or, as in the case of Mr. Penney, seemingly to order him away—the volume of the organ having been deliberately set high for this purpose. At the same time, information could be passed on and payment received, either from Pasavetti or Roskolnikov.

"On receiving information, Pasavetti would pin it into one of the organ cylinders, using sixteenth notes to make do = a, re = b, mi = c, fa = d, sol = e, la = f, ti = g, and do = h, and using eighth notes to make do = i, re = j, mi = k, and so forth. Using the various notes from sixteenth to whole notes, he was able to set up a total of forty different characters, which would include the full alphabet and zero to nine.

"The reason for the use of this rather complicated means of recording information is that it has been known for some time that the government has been opening letters at the General Post-office, especially those to and from foreign countries. These letters have been read, re-sealed, and sent on their way with the correspondent being none the wiser.

"The cylinders could be sent to the factory in Italy without arousing suspicion, since they were accompanied by a letter pointing out visibly needed repairs. At the factory, an agent in the receiving department intercepted the cylinders, translated their 'tunes' into words and numbers, then passed the information on, returning the cylinders to Pasavetti with coded instructions pinned into them. The Italian government has been asked to investigate and apprehend and prosecute those individuals involved.

"Crewes, it appears, was a victim of circumstances. He was hired by Pasavetti, first, because he was not a member of the ring and so could stand investigation if the organists fell under suspicion, and, second, because he was almost completely deaf. That is why he was not aware when the music was played too loudly and why he did not realise that the cylinder he was playing was not music.

"While Penney was passing on information to Pasavetti about the defence conference, Crewes took it upon himself to change the cylinder in the organ—a task usually performed by his employer. By accident, he picked up one of the information cylinders that Pasavetti had left where he could get to it quickly, since he was still pinning information into it.

"When Crewes began to play the cylinder, Pasavetti and Penney realised what had happened and rushed to stop

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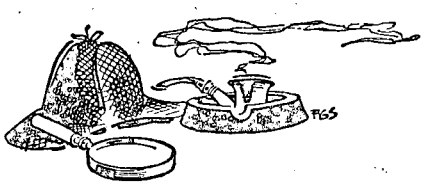
him, but when Pasavetti could not make Crewes hear over the loud playing of the organ, Penney, fearing that one of the bystanders, especially one of the musicians, might recognise that the 'noise' was a code, panicked and shot Crewes, then gave the pistol to Pasavetti to hide.

"The police are to be congratulated for having such a bright young man on the force as Constable Adams. We trust that his obvious intelligence and enterprise will be recognised and rewarded."

Chief Inspector Haines finished reading and looked up. By accident or design his gaze came to rest on young Carter, who had the decency to blush.



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Are you interested in restoration? Restoring antique furniture, perhaps? Old paintings? Vintage automobiles? Ah, you say you're a classic-car buff? That rebuilding an engine, replating chrome, refinishing wood, turns you on? Oh, you say you're not a fancier of early-model horseless carriages? It doesn't matter. You'll still be fascinated by this story of the rarest old car in the world, and of Mike Osmond's ultimate "labor of love" . . .

THE LAST SASSETTA

by HASKELL BARKIN

Three years ago Mike Osmond stumbled across the rarest car in the world.

His consuming interest in life was restoring classic automobiles to their exact original condition. To finance this he worked at a dull job that he loathed. He refused all offers of advancement which would make additional demands on his time, and he was unmarried.

One Saturday morning he left his home in Los Angeles for Winnemucca, Nevada. His current project was a 1930 Cord, and he had heard that a pair of front-wheel universals in almost perfect condition were available in Winnemucca. One way or another he would get them.

The address turned out to be a Gasoline Alley type of garage that looked as if it had been in business since Henry Ford got turned on by a conveyer belt. When Mike entered, his contact, an old-timer named Wilmer Butts, was setting the idle on a pick-up truck.

Butts was friendly enough and asked a fair price for the universals, which Mike haggled him down by one-fourth. Then Mike spent an hour picking the brains of the ancient mechanic for all the tricks of the trade stored there and for leads to other antique parts.

As he was about to leave, Wilmer Butts said, "I seem to recall an old car rusting away

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up on Mother Lode Mountain that you might want to look at."

"What kind?"

"Foreign, most likely. Damnedest long hood I ever saw, with the front seat open and the back closed in. I tried looking for a name somewhere, but there wasn't none."

"Any hood emblem? Any design on the hubcaps?"

"Come to think of it there was a funny-looking radiator cap. You'd call it a horse's head, except for the horn sticking out of the forehead."

Mike felt his stomach clench.

"You look like that means something," Wilmer Butts said.

"Kind of," Mike answered, forcing his voice to be calm. "Sounds like an old De Soto touring car a friend of mine's rebuilding, and he's going crazy trying to locate that ornament. Hell, maybe I'll pick it up for him. You say the wreck is abandoned?"

"Far as I know. It's government land. Used to be a gold-mining operation up there until 1931 when a fire shut it down completely. No great loss, the workings were just about dry anyway."

He told Mike how to get there—an hour's drive out of town and then 14 miles of dirt road up Mother Lode Mountain.

Mike raced along the state highway, taking maximum advantage of Nevada's lack of speed limits. It can't be, he thought as the needle tremored on 90. Nobody gets this lucky. Yet Wilmer Butts's description could fit only one make of car—a make that the richest men in the world regularly tried to add to their collections and couldn't.

A Sassetta.

Precisely 32 of these incredible automobiles had been produced in Italy between 1920 and 1924. Produced? Created!

Benito Sassetta was one of the greatest geniuses ever to design and build an automobile. His cars handled like racers. They rode like luxury liners. They had innovations in steering, suspension, and engineering that were 30 years ahead of their time. Some still haven't been duplicated.

His gearbox alone was a marvel. Shifting was so fast and easy that new drivers thought the factory had forgotten to connect the bottom of the lever.

All this was familiar to Mike. It was the stuff of his dreams. He knew that 32 cars had been sold to the world's wealthy, to its rulers. And then Benito Sassetta went insane. Maybe he was crazy all the time he was building his wonderful ma-

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chines. Sane men know you can't possibly achieve the perfection Sassetta had aimed at—and had achieved.

According to the Sassetta Society (headquarters, London), perhaps the world's most exclusive club because you have to own one to belong, 14 of the cars were now in the possession of presidents, sheiks, and other heads of state; 8 were owned by private individuals; 7 had been wrecked in accidents and by angry mobs; 2 were in museums.

And only one of the magic 32 was unaccounted for, Mike told himself over and over again.

Driving as fast as he dared, it still took him over an hour to snake up the mountain road. Twice, at hairpin turns, he almost went over the edge. Finally when he was high enough to see across the valley to the next range of mountains, he came to the burnt-out mine.

There was a gaping shaft with blackened timbers cut into the side of the hill. The landscape all around was littered with enormous machinery for crushing and shaking, with pumps, parts of donkey engines, and gears. A junkyard of rusting iron. Half a dozen single-story wooden buildings stood in various stages of dilapidation.

Mike sprinted to the long shack that Wilmer Butts had said was the bunkhouse. He turned the corner and came upon the ancient automobile, its hood crushed, headlamp askew, red finish burnt and scratched, and springs curling from the driver's seat. A silver unicorn reared up from the radiator cap, as if announcing to Mike that myths and dreams could, in the twinkling of an eye, become reality.

He circled the machine in awe. He opened a door and gazed inside at the moldering splendor of wood and leather. He tenderly rubbed a sleeve against the dull surface of a fender and uncovered a sudden depth of shine that threw the sun back at him like fire and brought tears to his eyes.

Somewhere behind him a girl's voice called out, "One of these days I'm going to chop off the top of that wreck with a can opener and plant geraniums in there."

Mike whipped around, angry at the interruption. Advancing toward him was someone in levis and a plaid lumberjack shirt. Her hair was in pigtails. As she came closer Mike saw that the girl was in her late twenties and more weathered than pretty. She held an ax, as though prepared to carry out her threat immediately.

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"Who're you?" Mike demanded.

"Well, for one thing I'm the owner of this property on which you're trespassing." Her voice had lost its friendliness.

"This is government land," he said.

"And the government gave me a lease. Sorry I don't have it with me."

"Then all this is yours? These shacks?"

"Uh huh."

"And all the machinery and this old clunker of a car?"

"That's right."

This plain country girl was the most important person in the world to him. And his stupid anger had made her hostile.

"Look," he said, flashing the smile that had persuaded dozens of classic-auto buffs to sell him treasured spare parts, "I want to apologize for being a little gruff. But I thought I ripped my sleeve on the fender of this junkheap. Friends?"

"What're you doing up here?"

"I heard about the mine and the fire. I figured there might be a couple of old trucks up here I could cannibalize to get parts for a Cord I'm rebuilding."

"A what?"

"A Cord. It's a front-wheel-drive car. Sort of a classic."

"We haven't got any trucks up here. Just this thing." She was a little friendlier now.

"What an ugly monster," Mike said with distaste.

"You think so? Seems kind of grand to me."

"You know what kind of car this is?"

"Some hunter said it was an old Packard."

"No, it's some short-lived mongrel nobody remembers. Cars like this were built for the new rich, to impress them. But it hasn't got any style, it's just a collection of standard parts. That's what makes the car so garish. Look at these fenders. They're Packard, all right, which is what fooled your hunter friend."

He opened the undamaged side of the long hood. It lifted silently and easily. Underneath, with its chromed exhaust pipes extending back on each side like wings, rested the great V-16 engine. Mike remembered what some owner had once written: "One does not speak while riding in a Sassetta; one listens."

"Why are you staring at the motor like that?" the girl asked.

"It's an engine. A motor is electric. And I'm staring because it's disgusting how they got away with such shoddy workmanship. Parts from everywhere. Ford, De Soto, Pierce-

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Arrow—nothing made to go with anything else."

"You're quite an expert."

"It's a relaxing hobby. Even if it does get to be a little expensive for a guy like me."

A cowbell clanged inside one of the old shacks.

"That's Uncle Oscar," the girl said. "He likes to meet people. Want to come inside?"

Mike followed her into the shack. An old man in a wheel chair sat beside an enameled kitchen table. The cowbell was on his lap. One hand trembled.

"Who the hell you been talking to out there?" the old man said.

Introductions were made, then the girl, whose name was Annie, said to Mike, "Uncle Oscar used to work at the mine until the fire."

"Back in 1931," Uncle Oscar said in sort of a gasp. "Damnedest thing you ever saw! One second I'm working at the shaker with the engine rattling in my ears. Next thing there's an explosion in the shaft and I don't hear nothing else. Deafened me, you know? Then there was flames everywhere."

He went on describing the disaster for half an hour, and then the operation of the mine. Mike played the perfect listener and asked interested questions. Finally he was able to say the important one.

"And that old wreck of a car, what was that doing up here?"

Uncle Oscar laughed and shook his head. "Belonged to the owner himself, Mr. Peacock. He was here visiting that very day. Happened to be in the shaft when it exploded. Anyway, I started clerking in a hardware store after that. But I still came up here every weekend for a little private prospecting."

"Any luck?"

"A couple of hundred dollars a year," Annie said. "Or about a nickel an hour."

Later, when Annie and Mike were outside, she said, "Since his stroke last March I drive him to the mine as often as possible. He loves it up here. I guess I do, too. No more prospecting, of course. Mostly he just sits and remembers."

"You know what? I like him, I really do."

She smiled warmly. Like a schoolgirl offering to show her doll collection, both proud and uncertain of being accepted, Annie suggested a tour of the site. Mike accepted enthusiastically.

Later they came to the old car again. Mike shook his head, as though still astonished that such a monstrosity could have been built. Suddenly he snapped his fingers.

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"I'll be damned!" he said, and reached in to grip the steering wheel, that circle of wood that Benito Sassetta had fashioned from the beams of century-old farmhouses.

"Uh huh, that's a Chevy steering wheel all right," he said.

"Why is that unusual if the car is all different parts?"

"There's this old guy I know who's restoring a '25 Chevy, like the one he drove cross-country on his honeymoon. His wife died last year and he really misses her. So I guess he's trying to bring back memories, kind of like your uncle and this place. Anyway, old Charley's been going crazy looking for the right steering wheel, and here it is."

He paused to let her make the offer.

"Mike, what do you do for a living?"

"I'm a draftsman." Can't you take a hint, stupid?

"Does your wife work with you on the Cord?"

"I'm not married. Say, I just got a crazy idea. Will you sell me this wreck? I can give Charley his steering wheel and make enough reselling the parts to do a little more work on my Cord. I don't know what to offer you. Does a hundred bucks sound fair?"

"The car isn't for sale, Mike."

"Why not?"

"Uncle Oscar is attached to everything at the mine. Especially since his stroke. Nothing new comes up here, and nothing leaves."

Sentimental value, eh? The girl was sharper than she looked. "Annie, I've got two hundred and four dollars with me. Cash. It's all I can afford, okay?"

"You sure doubled your price fast."

"Because I can understand how your uncle feels. And I can probably still make a little."

"If I hold out would you double the offer again?"

"That's all there is, Annie. And if my gamble doesn't pay off I live on beans for a month."

"I don't think you're playing straight with me. And I don't like being treated like some country bumpkin. Maybe you'd just better get out of here. Right now."

"Oh, I'm a shrewd character, all right," Mike spat out sarcastically. "Two hundred dollars, and I can sell the parts for maybe four hundred. After towing the carcass down fourteen miles of dirt road, advertising in all the car magazines, and finally becoming wealthy as the responses roll in. Boy, am I shrewd! Well, you can keep your hunk of junk!"

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As she stared back at him, still defiant, Mike could see a new element in her mood. Uncertainty.

"I'm sorry, Annie," he said. "I didn't mean to be nasty. I guess it hurt me, hearing that from you."

"What's so special about me?"

"Hard to say. But I'd like to find out, if you'll give me a chance. I'm on vacation this week. Maybe you'll let me take you out to dinner, if I stay around."

"No need for that."

"I promise you, not a single word about you-know-what. Okay?"

Monday morning he phoned his boss to say he'd be out sick for a while. And he saw Annie every night that week. She was easy to flatter and hungry for affection.

Late Friday night, after they spent an hour necking in his car, Mike begged Annie to come to his motel. She refused and hoped he understood. It was just something she wasn't ready to do. But she did like him a lot. She really did.

Her declaration was more than enough. Now he knew that his plan for Sunday would succeed, and make him the owner of the rarest car in the world.

He persuaded Annie to spend the whole weekend with him, instead of taking Uncle Oscar up to the mine. On Sunday afternoon the two of them had a picnic in a field near town. When the chicken was eaten and the wine bottle was empty, Mike lay back with his head on Annie's lap while she stroked his hair.

"This has been the greatest week of my life," he said.

"Mine, too."

"I hope you don't mind. But I got you a present."

He handed her a sterling-silver necklace.

"Mike, it's beautiful," she said. "But I can't take something like this from you. It's much too expensive."

"Annie, I've been crazy about restoring cars for about four years. Nothing else mattered to me. Before that it was motorcycles. Rebuilding them, running with a pack, doing crazy stunts, even getting myself in trouble with the law. Before motorcycles it was lifting weights until my muscles were stiff.

"You see, Annie, I've always had to have some obsession to lose myself in. Only now I've been stopped in my tracks. You've made me realize that another person can be ten times more important than all the rest of that stuff. This necklace cost me the two hundred dollars you

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turned down for the car." He added, with embarrassment, "It's the first time I ever wanted to give something to another person."

He gently slipped the silver chain around her neck.

"You were right in not trusting me," he said. "I lied about why I wanted that wreck. Truth is, it's got parts for my Cord that I gave up hope of ever finding."

"Why did you lie?"

"Figured you'd raise the price if you knew how much I needed the parts. Pretty small view of people, I guess."

Nobody said anything for a while. Mike watched the sun beginning to go down behind the mountains. And he knew Annie was looking at him.

"Would you do me a favor?" she said quietly. "Drive us to the mine?"

Mike could barely control his excitement as he raced along the highway. In his mind he composed a letter to the Sassetta Society. *Gentlemen, I have been fortunate enough to acquire the last of the Sassettas. Since it requires extensive rebuilding, any guidance that my fellow owners . . . Naturally I would be honored if your Society would consider my application for membership.*

When they arrived, Annie led him through the dark to the cabin. Inside she lit none of the lamps, but sat down on the moonlit bed and looked up at Mike.

"I don't know if you're still interested," she said softly. "But . . . well, it's my first time wanting to give a person something, too."

Afterward, looking through the window at the mine site, Mike pointed to the Sassetta.

"The crazy things that bring people together," he said.

"What about the old man with the '25 Chevy? Was that the truth?"

"Sure. But he'll find a steering wheel somewhere."

"Take it. And all the other parts you need for yourself. I'll manage Uncle Oscar."

"Not practical. It'd need a chestful of special tools. Frankly, it'd be simpler for me to haul away the whole mess."

"I wish I could let you, Mike. But it would upset him too much. Last month some hunter took a few pot shots at the side of the crusher and Uncle Oscar had his own rifle out ready to kill the man."

"Suppose he came up one weekend and the car just wasn't here."

"I can't do it to him. Please understand."

"The man's crazy! Why do you spend your life worrying about him?"

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"You said you didn't care about the parts any more."

"I was thinking about you!" he snapped back, trying to salvage his position. And then he said the only words that would get him the car. "I want you to marry me. Right away."

Annie finally agreed that a rest home was the best place for Uncle Oscar, though she hated the thought of it. He had refused to come to Los Angeles with them, so there was no alternative.

The ecstatic days of the honeymoon flowed into weeks of quieter intimacy, as Mike came to know every inch of the Sassetta in his garage, and discovered the wonderful little surprises old Benito had designed into it.

The Cord had been sold, of course. The money came in handy. Mike had impetuously sworn to restore the garish junkheap from Mother Lode Mountain no matter what the cost. Because, he told Annie, it had brought him the most important thing in his life.

He passed most evenings and weekends in his garage. Sometimes in the early morning hours he'd just flop down on the cot and sleep there. He spent hundreds of hours overseeing the labors of mechanics doing work beyond his skills. With the aid of the Sassetta Society his letters pursued parts and materials in Asia, Europe, the United States, and South America.

Of course Annie was upset by his preoccupation, and there were some arguments. She always came back worse from her visits to Uncle Oscar, who was deteriorating in both mind and body. Mike steered her into redecorating the house. He would occasionally begrudge an hour and some money to quiet her with dinner at a restaurant, and he promised her all his attention once his labor of love was finished.

As the months passed he felt like some mad juggler. Slaving away at the car, racing back to calm Annie in her latest complaint about loneliness or money, then returning to the garage as soon as he dared.

But the car was slowly being resurrected. In Milan, colors were being mixed using the same pigments Benito had insisted on. The engine ran smoothly, rebuilt from scratch. The seats had been elegantly upholstered by a genius whom Mike had discovered in Santa Monica. The sheet metal was flawless. Everything chrome had been replated. Wood for the interior appointments arrived from India, and after days of experimentation Mike hit

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upon the exact mixture of stain to duplicate the original finish.

One afternoon when he came home from the office Annie announced there had been a phone call for him that morning. The tone of her voice signaled a bad argument.

"His name was Sir George Walliston. President of the Sassetta Society. He's in Los Angeles and he wanted to know if it would be convenient for him to see the car."

She was controlling hysteria. As on the day that Uncle Oscar had died.

"I was going to surprise you about that, Annie. It was only last month I found out—"

"You wrote to him the week we got married. We talked a long time. He was here."

"Okay, so the car is worth more than I let on. By the time we got involved I was too ashamed to tell you the truth."

"You are a damned liar, Mike. You married me for that car!"

"Where can I reach Sir George?"

"You don't need me. You didn't want me! But you didn't know any other way to get that machine!"

"I asked you where Sir George Walliston is."

"Uncle Oscar died because you had to get your hands on that blasted thing!"

She screamed her hatred. Mike shook Annie by the shoulders, demanding an answer. Then he slapped her and she spat out the name of the hotel.

Sir George told him over the phone that he would love to have Mike show him the car in detail, but he was leaving soon. Would Mike have a drink with him at the airport?

Sir George was a lean well-tailored old man reeking of wealth. Mike could barely understand his accent. "Actually? You supervised the entire restoration yourself?. Superbly done. If you're ever in London I hope you'll give me your opinion on a few sticky problems I've encountered with my own Sassetta."

The Englishman offered Mike $35,000 for the car. No? Well, at least he hoped Mike would give him a chance to bid on it if he ever decided to sell the Sassetta.

Never before had Mike felt so exhilarated. On returning home he headed straight for the garage. Not to work, but simply to be with his automobile and savor his joy more fully.

He entered and switched on the light.

Every piece of sheet metal on the car was dented and bent out of shape. The metal was split at the welded seams. The

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paint was scraped and gouged. Two doors leaned back crazily, wrenched past their limits. The leather seats were slashed. And everywhere—on the hood, on the carpeting—were scattered flakes of paint and splinters of glass.

Oil was on the garage floor, and worse than that, there was a stink of burnt oil, the odor that every mechanic recognizes instantly. It comes when a dry engine has been kept running, its insides heating and expanding, until the whole thing literally welds itself into a single hunk of iron.

The car was collapsed on one corner, where the wooden spokes of a wheel had been shattered by the sledge-hammer that still lay there. Mike dropped to his knees and began caressing the wheel, and dumbly tried fitting the shattered spokes into their places between the rim and the hub. This perfect wheel that 50 years ago a superb craftsman had spent weeks constructing.

He rose and went out to look for her. The front door was locked from inside. He got around back somehow—running and screaming—in time to see her hurry out with a suitcase. She dropped it, and he threw himself at her. And finally he was using the sledge-hammer . . .

The garage today bears no marks of Mike's obsession with antique automobiles, nor of the destruction that was wrought there. Its walls are whitewashed clean. Each day when he returns from the office Mike enters, wrapped against the air-conditioned chill, and attends to Annie with a love he never knew was in him.

Now all her scars are gone. Her arms and legs seem ready to move, as if bone had never been shattered or muscle crushed. Annie's skin looks as healthy and smooth as he remembers it, although he is not yet completely satisfied.

Mike ponders her nose, which he has been working on these past weeks. The slight bump on her bridge disturbs him. It was there before, of course, but perhaps it ought to be removed. He ponders the question for a while. No, Annie was born with that slight bump in her nose. It was original equipment.

Well then, she's almost finished. He steps back to admire her. Yes, not a bad job. For a beginner.

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This is the 367th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . mystery and Oriental subtlety in Tibet, "in the high small world of the Lama Thich Sang"—an unusual "first story." No, let's not be parsimonious in praise. An unusual story whether it happened to be a first, a fifth, or a fifteenth . . .

The author, Fritzi Franz Lumen, has been a farmhand, construction worker, mechanic, musician, itinerant artist, mountain climber, airplane pilot, radio engineer, teacher of computer programing, and business executive. (What stories he has to tell!) He has traveled extensively—in Europe, Asia, North America—and he speaks, among other languages, French, German, Korean, Japanese, and Persian. (What vocational, geographical, cultural, and etymological backgrounds to draw on for the stories he has to tell!) . . .

THE PRAYER WHEELS

by FRITZI FRANZ LUMEN

"War Correspondent Missing" has become a logo with the hens working it to death. And wearing almost as thin were new leads for my own "Specials from Ernie Cole," with the war in Southeast Asia winding down.

So I used the warming diplomatic trend and a friend in the Embassy to wangle a visa and set off for high Tibet. There might be a reheat in the old genocide charges filed with the International Council of Jurists at Geneva; or failing that, a series on happy peasants under agrarian reform, high-altitude style.

And I might still be able to get myself arrested.

Fifty miles in I was "detained" at a C.P. and taken before a painfully polite but positive little Chinese captain.

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He was over-plump and under strain of some sort, but he was scrupulously correct.

"Arrested? Oh, no, sir. No, indeed, Mr. Cole. Only delayed, shall we say. Until your papers can be confirmed. It is for your own protection, sir. This is a treacherous people, and surly, as you shall see."

His English was excellent—no comic-page cliches of "flied lice"; but what Oriental officer's is not, these days? All of them have studied at Fort Ord or Hood or Benning. Even the enemy—whoever currently he may be. I was warily respectful. A tense fat man always frightens me.

The next morning found me staring from an unglazed window in a tumble of temple buildings, my prebreakfast bowl of salted and buttered tea cooling on the rough stone sill.

Around me hulked the mud-mortar and fieldstone walls of a lamasery. Across from it the Gyangtse road had at this point no shoulder at all. It fell away sheer to the floor of a narrow and arid valley that was little more than a mile-deep crevasse. It was inhabited, though. At its bottom I had glimpsed, while coming in, a scraggle of thatched-roof huts. They were the only evidence of humanity other than the monastery complex itself.

The latter was a semide-serted sprawl of buildings, flush to the road at its inner edge, which clung to the mountain-side like a sea bird's nest.

South, to my right, the road wound down into Sikkim and India. A traditional invasion route, it was appropriately the way I had come in. North, to my left, it clawed and scrabbled deeper into the "High Land," as the Tibetans call their country, and deteriorated as it went. On policy, I have heard.

Everywhere the horizon was hidden from me by the myriad pinnacles that thrust upward into the chill spring sky. They looked artificial and dangerously innocent, and impossibly high even from my heady perch at 15,000 feet.

Directly in front of me the road was not visible at all. It was too close in to a sort of unrailed sun deck onto which my room on the second floor opened. Behind me, however, the road burst into view beyond the courtyard wall.

There in the thin sunlight I could see a double line of workers and their warders. The guards wore the quilted rag-doll uniform of the Chinese People's Army. They lounged on their rifles or sat on rocks and smoked. The laborers were native villagers, probably brought up from the huts I'd

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seen. All on the road were males, stooped or sitting to the tedious task of hand-breaking and scattering new roadbed stones. These were brought to them by their cloth-booted and faded women in flat head-held baskets from the slopes above. There was no talk except an occasional guttural command.

Three of the Chinese guards, however, were exceptionally active. They formed a team which moved along the inner ditch, slashing and smashing downward at something with their rifle butts. I couldn't make out what. They were shouting, gesticulating, jeering mechanically.

The Tibetans seemed to pay no attention to this nameless vandalism, as though they were too tired to protest. They had undoubtedly been at their drudgery from dawn on this day and for many days before and were bone-weary. Even so, as they crouched there they were proudly tall and thin in their tattered robes, and their gaunt highland grace made the Chinese look squat and ugly.

Then I started to sense something else under their listlessness at the pounding monotony. It appeared from those nearer to me that the Tibetans were far from aggrieved and might even be gratified at what was going on. They would glance up furtively from under their batwing hats at the three-man demolitions team, then smirk and grin at their nearer neighbors. They exchanged winks, small signals, and veiled nods. Plainly the unexplained mischief of the trio of guards was giving the villagers untold glee.

"They think we're damned! And doing it to ourselves!"

I jumped, jostling my tea. It slopped and soaked darkly into the crude stone sill. The little fat Captain had come along the sun-deck terrace from the left and stopped outside my window. An arch from the refectory also opened on this balcony, two doors beyond my chamber.

"Superstition, you know. I'm having their prayer wheels broken up. They bring them and line the road beside where they work. I've ordered them all broken."

"Opiate of the people?" I murmured.

"What? Oh. Yes. Well, an enemy to my propaganda, at least. I've been ordered to convert as well as work them, you see. So I must."

Peking had spoken.

"And clean them up. They're a filthy lot, morally as well as physically. Multiple husbands!"

I shook my head, as if sympathetically.

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"Anyhow, they think we are courting disaster and will bring down heaven's wrath on our heads."

"And will you?" I said it as mildly as I could but he glanced sharply at me. Then his eyefolds vanished in a grin.

"But you are kidding me, no? Will you join me at breakfast?"

I've never been able properly to dislike these people.

I picked my way through cramped interior passages past a bead curtain of discarded Buddhist rosaries. The Captain had said they belonged to all the monks who had ever died here. And he was right. There was an aura of antique filth about them, the feel of centuries of unwashed grime.

He was waiting, and we both watched while an incredibly ancient, stooped, and unclean old woman brought me my morning bowl of Tsamba. It is a concoction of barley laced with the ubiquitous salted and buttered tea and was served with a battered unclean scoop. But it looked hot and so was hopefully sterilized.

The Captain sniffled, pressing his temple with pudgy fingers.

"It is high altitude—sinusitis, do you say?" he said when he saw me glance at him.

I nodded. I'd gotten it once covering a copper strike in Quito. "Feels like a screw press clamped to your head."

"And I can't smell anything," he complained.

"You're lucky," I told him, eyeing the old woman. Mixed with her own effluvium she carried a rancid odor of burnt yak fat. From the lamps, perhaps, or the cooking.

He turned for a time to his rice, the food up here only of the rich and of conquerors, concentrating on the steady whip of his chopsticks. He ate with the studied voracity of all Chinese males, drivulets of yak butter from the sauce forming at the corners of his mouth. Finally he flung his chopsticks rattling to the table.

"They sent me up here to fail, Mr. Cole. But I shall not. I will show them, the Long Marchers and old cadre and the rest. We of the Guard can also work and build. I will not only complete this impossible road of theirs, but I shall convert these devil-worshipping heathens. And on time."

Sweat beaded his upper lip, either from pious urgency or his unhealth at this altitude.

"See here," he went on. "I'm distributing these—ten thousand in these valleys the last two months."

He pulled out a leaflet from

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a bundle beneath his chair and handed it to me. It was brightly printed on one side with Chinese characters, obviously propaganda. The other side was blank.

"Mm-m-m." I didn't want to antagonize him. "But—can they read? And Chinese?"

His fat little fingers waved me off.

"We are having them read aloud while they're working. In translation. And we know it is having an effect. They greatly respect the written word, apparently. Why, do you know we have not found a single one discarded? We have checked most carefully. They are treasuring them!"

Or using them as we once did in rural America. But I held my peace.

"You will report all fairly, I trust, Mr. Cole," he continued. "And that we are doing them no harm, but good. What is wrong, after all? They are dirty, we make them wash. They are lazy, we make them work. Are these not virtues you respect also in the West? They should themselves have made these roads, centuries ago."

To expedite their own conquest? And what of the freedom not to wash?

"You'll find my reporting fair, I think," I said aloud. "As others have. As soon as I can get around." He had commandeered and then sent back my jeep and Sherpa driver.

"The People's Government supplies all transport, to truly and properly neutral journalists."

Or neutralized, I amended silently.

At supper the Captain's ebullient certainty was gone.

"How can they do this? How can they resist?" He spoke more to himself than to me.

"What's the matter? What are they doing?"

"We broke up their wheels. You saw?"

"Yes, I saw. What then?"

"They've started setting them up again. Higher, on the hillsides. Beyond our reach."

"I see."

"What bothers me is, where would they get such an idea? They have no leadership."

It was clearly an article of his faith that no one could do his thinking for himself. To act meant there must be leaders to command the act.

"What about their lamas or whatever you call 'em?"

"The jack priests?" He was contemptuous. "We flushed them all out long ago and sent them inland."

"To work on other roads?" I could imagine it.

"Paugh!" Contempt became

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disgust. "Not them. They would die first. Some did. No, we sent them to prison. They were like princes, it seems, who would not work with their hands. Not even to save their lives. Anyhow, we got them all. Except for the old chief lama, the abbot. One Thich Sang, or Doctor Joy as you would call him in your language. He disappeared just before we arrived here."

"You're sure?"

"Of course!" He was impatient. "We searched the village and this place. And the surrounding range. Though we know he was too old to hide up there." He jabbed a pudgy finger toward the peaks. "We believe he was killed trying to get there, or attempting to flee the country. They have much money, you understand."

"You're sure he's not one of them?" I pointed to the workers on the road. They were being kept at it till well past dusk, apparently as usual.

He snorted. "A full doctor, a lama? At menial labor?" He snorted again and broke into a cough.

In the morning I went out with the Captain to inspect the road construction. Seen more closely, the veiled triumph of the Tibetans as they nursed their bruised but beautifully sinewed hands was unmistakable. The old woman was out behind us, serving them with water which was probably dirty.

Near one group—I could not tell from which individual—I caught a strong and acrid whiff of candle wax and incense. Had one of them the strength, after all this, to spend his nights in the vaults and crypts at prayers? I glanced quickly at the Captain, but he had smelled nothing. His sinusitis, of course.

The remainder of that day and the next I spent rummaging in the lamasery. In one room there were a number of religious books, many in English and some in French and German. But there was nothing like a full library, and nothing to sustain my treasured misconceptions, gleaned in a lifetime of reading Kipling and Maugham and James Hilton, of super insights and intellects in a timeless capsule world. Only a primal squalor.

I was quite unprepared for the little Captain's fury at supper on that second day.

"Those prayer wheels!" he sputtered when I inquired. "I've got to stop them! They're still putting them up!" He bounced and quivered with impotent fervency. "I know! I'll show them! I'll have them shot away!"

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He spun and shook his finger at the road outside in malicious exultation.

"I'll blast away their wheels as they are blasting my career. And if some of the lama's precious parishioners happen to be shot by accident—why, that will teach them not to impede the course of history!"

I shuddered, thinking of Far East marksmanship.

Early the next day I was at my window when the firing began. The initial random shots and bursts soon steadied into the dead rhythm of "firing for effect"—which I recognized all too well from Vietnam and the decade of "little" wars that had preceded it.

The Captain's whole company was out. Some of the rag-doll soldiers had taken off their padded jackets and stood firing in their droopy britches.

By craning to the right I could just make out a few of the slender targets. They were prayer wheels of the wind-driven type, larger than the others but more lightly built. Even as I stared I saw one shatter and another leap from its propping and spin down the slope toward the road. They would roll and roll until they were caught in a rut or stopped by an obstruction. Many of the marksmen were missing, and I detected several duds.

Down along the road the Tibetans continued their work. They were almost complacent, seemingly paying no attention. Yet that same secret smugness pervaded their entire attitude. Were not the wheels still spinning, the set of their backs and shoulders said?

At noon the Captain did not bother to come in. He went without eating, or perhaps ate with his men for their morale's sake.

My own Tsamba wanted to stay not upon the order of its going down, so I spent the afternoon prone and did without supper. But I listened, and all day the firing went on. At dusk it became desultory, then tapered off. I fell asleep.

In the brightness of dawn I awakened, curiously refreshed. There is wine in the high air once you are used to it. The hard trestle bed and the rough yak-wool blankets were suddenly restful and I had slept myself out. I felt extraordinarily well.

The Captain was already at his rice in the refectory and also in fine fettle.

"I missed you at dinner, Mr. Cole. Well: you see? That did it! It's settled. I've given the villagers a free day from the road to celebrate. There'll be no more of this—"

He stopped abruptly to

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listen, but there was no need. There was no way to avoid hearing it. A rattling roar, clearly audible through the heavy mud-stone walls, that rose even as we paused. It swelled perceptibly from an insistent clatter to a din like a giant telling his rosary or shaking an abacus. The volume and momentum of the noise increased, surrounding and pressing in on us.

I looked over at the old woman. She was calmly scooping out my Tsamba.

The Captain hurried out onto the balcony. He stood transfixed, staring around to the right and then up behind the buildings, obviously frightened.

"What is it?" I shouted.

There was no answer.

I went as far as the arch. Nothing was visible from there but a few guards, who had apparently run out to look. They were now scurrying back to shelter behind the building and courtyard walls. I edged around to the outer corner of the balcony and looked up.

It was like peering into the maw of an enormous pepper mill. The entire flank of the mountain was alive with tumbling stones, ranging from the size of a fist to a big man's head. They jumped and jounced down the side of the hill like huge hail, in a jumbling roil. With them ran or followed more rocks and gravel and the loose pebbles they dislodged, like progeny. Individual stones sailed through the air with a kind of elephantine grace, or bounded ponderously from ledge to ledge.

The barrage was being constantly renewed. It originated high in a series of crevices near the crest, and each rock appeared to have been wrapped in a separate paper covering. These coverings were twisted at the two ends as one would tissue oranges for crating.

As the stones skittered down the long slope some of them lost their wrappings. The loose papers flew free in the dust above the slide, looking like strange origami birds.

The players of these bizarre bowls were all invisible against the gray blue of the granite crags. The blue robes, I reasoned. And the Tibetan women and children must all be up there with their men. This incessant rain of rocks argued many more hands than I had seen so far.

By now the Captain had recovered the rudiments of locomotion. He staggered forward, his normally gamboge skin so pale it verged on green. Then his round face darkened

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to maroon with rage. He went jerkily to his hands and knees and peered below, into the shadow of the sheltering overhang. He sighted someone from his cowering company and shouted an angry order.

His answer was a stone the bulk of a coffee mug, still in its paper wrapper. It arced up over the eaves to the flat of the roof, rolled a few feet, and bumped to a stop.

The Captain pounced, still ridiculous on all fours. He squatted back, removed the paper, and examined it carefully on both sides. He put it down at his side, appeared to meditate for a time, then lifted the wrapper to look at it again. At last he let his hand, with the paper in it, fall limply away and stared vacantly out at the valley opposite.

Finally he stumbled to his feet. The paper slipped from his nerveless stubby fingers. He tottered to the arch, through the dining hall, and out the bead curtains on the other side.

I picked up the wrapper. It was one of the Captain's propaganda leaflets, one side battered but intact. On the other—

On the other side it was a prayer sheet, like those which are put inside the wheels.

Someone had meticulously scrawled over it, from edge to edge, in intricate Burmo-Tibetan script that turned it irrefutably into prayers. Carefully, painfully, on every last square centimeter.

I looked back up the mountain. There were thousands of these flying sheets and stones. Someone had gathered every pamphlet the Captain had issued. Someone else had written and written and written through the weeks until now every insane rolling bowl on that slope was itself a prayer wheel, spinning and whirling on its long mad plunge.

Then came a subtle change in the continuum of tumult. A muted rumbling grew under the clacking clatter and threatened to swallow it. The new fuller tone developed into a swollen and earthshaking counterbass.

As I stared, a whole vast sheath of the hillside began to slip and shudder. It looked as though the mountain itself was starting to detach and slide, beyond the knoll that protected the lamasery. Awestricken, I watched an entire layer of rocks and shale, gathering strength and speed with each passing demisecond, pour ponderously down and across the road.

And where it passed, no road was left. Only a great gaping gout, making the mountain continuous with the floor of the valley. At the center was

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simply a gouged spout which had carried away the roadbed and its supporting shelf for a hundred yards on either side.

In the after-clatter of trickling, clicking pebbles I held my breath. My God! The villagers down there, the huts! I am no Catholic, but I think I crossed myself. Then I remembered. No, no, the Tibetans were safe. They were all up here. Someone had thought of that, too.

Now through the loudness of the sudden silence, lit by shafts of sun through the puffs of dust, there came a new sound. A squeaking, as of a boxed rat trying to clamber out, and with the squeaking, a scrabbling. It was the Captain. He came into view, below the balcony overhang. He was again on all fours, whimpering in a hysterical tremolo that no longer sounded human.

He scrambled up the slope to the right, avoiding the area where the Tibetans had been hidden and angling toward the higher ledges and the peaks beyond. He was beginning to pant and sweat. I could hear the interruptions to his whinnying cry and see the glinting in the sun. The pale light caught on flecks of drool that the rising wind whipped from his lips.

How long I watched and listened I don't know. It was hard to take one's eyes from the figure of the frenzied little fat man, shrinking as it mounted ever higher. He climbed and climbed until he was a fly, a specimen insect pinned to the vertical starkness, and still he climbed.

A moment or a millenium later there was a touch on my arm. The old woman was beckoning me inside. Ranged behind the table were a number of the older villagers, indistinguishable from each other in their faded dull-blue robes. At the outer door stood a shaggy Drokpa herdsman.

One of the old men made signs. Was I now willing to go home?

Ah, yes. Why not? There was nothing for me here, an intruder. For the first time in many years I felt like a sneak or snoop and was faintly ashamed of my profession.

Very well. He pointed. The tough-looking tribesman would guide me up and around the slide and south to Sikkim.

I nodded.

The old woman offered me my passport and other papers, retrieved from the Captain's effects—and my heart clutched in my chest like a clenched fist.

Just how had she held them out to me? And that odor—of candle wax and incense and burning oil from yak-fat lamps. It reeked from *her!* But there

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ıust be proof. Proof—

I was surprised to find the ritten-over propaganda sheet ill in my left hand. I offered it ɔ her.

"Here. This is yours."

I let it slip deliberately, naneuvering so that it planed ınderneath the table. When she ɔent to recover it I knew. I had he proof.

"You. It was you, in the rypts at night. It was you who wrote those prayers."

She did not answer imnediately, but slowly straightned. The crooked back unwarped. And there was a winkle in her delicately acanthic eyes.

"Come, now," I persisted. "Your people. How many among them can read at all, much less English? Or write?"

The old woman was now a man, as aged as before but perceptibly more youthful—taller than the others, erect and spare, with the look of the mountaineer.

He sighed. "It is true. As you say. Unfortunately, few are literate. Tell me: how did you know?"

"I didn't, until you gave me my passport right side up. Courtesy is difficult to disguise. Or to discard."

He sighed again, but the smile deepened on the beautiful old-ivory face.

"But the clincher was your knees."

The amused mouth permitted a faint *moue* of astonishment. "Oh? How so?"

"When a woman in skirts bends to pick up something, she invariably closes her knees and turns them to the side. You squatted, then knelt, with your knees wide-open. Like a man. A principle I learned from our good Mark Twain."

Then something else struck me.

"But how could the Captain have failed to find you? Literally underneath his nose? The Commie is no respecter of feminine delicacy; they could easily have checked."

The fine old eyes brightened in the now curiously seamless face.

"It is a principle I learned from your excellent Edgar A. Poe and his purloined letter, and from your excellent G. K. Chesterton and his invisible man. In the Orient, as you know, women are beneath all notice. And as you say, old customs are hard to break."

The Drokpa herdsman shifted uneasily from foot to foot and began to hitch his skirts up under his belt, preparing to depart.

From the doorway I looked back. The old chief lama was still smiling at me.

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The act of murder has other names . .

THE ASSASSIN

by EDWARD WELLEN

EXTRA: Wish I could watch his jaw drop when I come on and upstage him. Listen to Harry Hawk out there, will you, playing all the more extravagantly for knowing he's in a bad play. Harry, I see in you how much ambition's debt remains to pay. Here we are at last—Act Three, Scene Two. Harry has the stage to himself now. Means my entrance is near.

STAR: "Don't know the manners of good society, eh? Well, I guess I know enough to turn you inside out, old gal—you sockdolagizing old mantrap."

EXTRA: What a reading! If I couldn't do better than that—come on, come on, that's my cue. Into the skin of my role. Open the door, enter. Arm out, gun to head, hand steady, trigger-pull firm. The business well done. Now the graceful leap. What—? Spur hooked in flag. Don't stop now, show must go on. My line, my line. Deep breath. "*Sic semper tyrannis!*"

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Professor Amos Ponsonby, Briarwood College's Professor of English emeritus, is awakened after midnight by an emergency call. Once again Ponsonby has to work against time—to decipher a baffling message with a man's life hanging in the balance . . .

PONSONBY AND THE RANSOM NOTE

by ALAN K. YOUNG

To Mrs. Garvey, phone calls after midnight, like telegrams, could mean only one thing: somewhere, for someone, disaster had struck.

She burst into Ponsonby's bedroom, her purple robe flying, her pink nightcap ballooning over a rat's nest of curlers, almost before the Professor had time to replace his bedside phone. "Saints preserve us!" she cried. "Is it Martians come to attack us?"

Having lived under Mrs. Garvey's benevolent tyranny for the past 20 of his 78 years, Ponsonby was well aware that his housekeeper drew conclusions much as a surrealist paints the world—always fascinatingly, but seldom rationally. "Calm yourself, madam," he said; "that was Helen Scott. She's had a bit of a shock and wants to come over to see me. It seems her husband—"

"Ah," said Mrs. Garvey knowingly, "the poor man's been taken!"

Ponsonby glanced sharply at his housekeeper. "How did *you* know?"

"Whatever else would bring her out in the middle of the night? Crazed with grief, I shouldn't wonder, seeing as how she must know well enough who it is what's come for him!"

"What the devil are you talking about?"

"Exactly!" said Mrs. Garvey, nodding sagely. "Every soul in Briarwood knows Henry Scott's an atheist and freethinker who's not set foot in church these thirty years. So it'll not be the Gates of Peter he'll be knocking on tonight, I promise you."

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"Oh, for heaven's sake," said Ponsonby testily, "he'll not be knocking on anyone's gate. I do not use euphemisms, madam. If I say he's been taken, I mean he's been taken!"

"And well may you say it," said Mrs. Garvey, busily straightening the bed Ponsonby had vacated. "When the Grim Reaper calls there's no denying him."

"Confound it, woman, I mean *taken!* Henry Scott's been kidnaped! Abducted!"

Horror registered on every line of the housekeeper's usually placid countenance. "Lord preserve us, you don't mean to say some scoundrel's made off with his corpse?"

Closing his eyes, Ponsonby took a deep breath, held it a moment, then slowly exhaled. "No, madam. I mean that Henry Scott is alive, and it is to be hoped, unharmed, and is being held for ransom. Now will you kindly go down to the kitchen and make us some coffee? I imagine Helen—"

"Don't you think maybe a nice pot of tea—?"

"Coffee."

"Coffee at this hour and you'll not be getting back to sleep all night. And then tomorrow—"

"Coffee!" said Ponsonby firmly.

"—you'll not have a civil word for anybody."

A few moments later Ponsonby sat across his study hearth from Helen Scott, listening as his distraught neighbor, wife of Briarwood County's most prominent investment counselor, told of her husband's kidnaping.

"Henry often works quite late on Monday night," said the small blonde woman in a voice tight with emotion, "so I didn't think anything about it but just went on up to bed around ten the way I usually do. Then maybe twenty minutes ago—just a little after midnight—I heard someone pounding on the door, but by the time I got downstairs there was nobody there. This note was lying on the doormat with Henry's watch on top of it. And it *is* in Henry's handwriting; I'd know it anywhere."

Ponsonby turned his attention to the note she had handed him. It was written on heavy brown paper which had three rough-torn edges and a fourth whose miniature serrations suggested the top edge of a common grocery bag.

"Dear Helen," it began. "Please do not panic when you get this, as my life depends on your keeping a cool head.

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"I have been kidnaped and am being held for fifty-thousand dollars' ransom. You will be contacted within forty-eight hours with instructions on when and where to deliver the money.

"Whatever you do, do not call the police. My kidnapers assure me that they have ways of finding out, and that they'll kill me the minute they learn the police have been notified.

"I do not think you will have much trouble raising the money if you do just as I tell you. To begin with, there's 15 thousand, 7 hundred in our joint account at the Briarwood Savings, and 21 hundred in our joint account at Valley National. With that to start with, the rest should come easy.

"To get the balance, however, you will have to translate securities into cash. Start with the safe in my den. The combination, in case you've forgotten it, is (turning first to the right) 10-9-15-4. There are 2 municipal bonds in there which are worth about a thousand each.

"Next, drive over to my office in Quincy and open the safe there. I don't believe you've been over to see me since I moved up to the 14th floor; just turn left as you get off the elevator—suite 25, almost to the end of the hall.

"The safe is in a corner of my private office. The combination (again starting to the right) is 21-17-12-7, then right again until it clicks. You'll find 3 different bundles of securities—21 hundred shares of Crown Realty, worth about 19 hundred altogether; 24 utility bonds for which you should be able to get about 15 thousand; and 11 hundred shares of Suburban Electric which should be good for about 10 thousand. Take them all to Sam Higgins to sell for you, but don't tell him why. Your signature will be all he'll need.

"For the remainder, go to see Amos Ponsonby. He's good at this sort of thing and I know he'll be glad to do all he can. As a matter of fact, maybe you should go to him first, as he may have some idea on how to raise the money without selling all those securities.

"In the meantime, darling, please try not to worry. These men haven't mistreated me at all; in fact, they haven't even gagged or blindfolded me at any time, and I have their word they will let me go unharmed as soon as you have delivered the fifty thousand in cash. So please follow these instructions to the letter and by tomorrow night I'm sure we'll be back together again, as always, just the two of us.

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"In love and hope, Henry."

At the bottom he had added a postscript: "Please forgive the stationery—it was the only paper I could find in this room."

Ponsonby lowered the note to his lap. "And you say this is Henry's handwriting?"

"Oh, yes, I'd know it anywhere. But even so it's got to be some sort of bluff, Amos. Because we don't have any joint savings accounts, and there *is* no safe in Henry's den, and his office in Quincy is still on the third floor of the Granite Building just where it's always been. So I know he's trying to tell me something, but I don't know *what*."

"Which is precisely why he's urged you to bring the note to me, my dear. When he says that I am 'good at this sort of thing,' he isn't referring to raising money, I assure you. And as for his real message, I'm virtually certain he's trying to tip us off to where he's being held. He's made it a point, you see, to tell us that his abductors didn't blindfold him, which means he must have been able to see where they were taking him."

It also meant, Ponsonby reflected uneasily, that Henry Scott had also been allowed to see his kidnapers' faces, a strong indication that they had no intention of letting him go free, alive, even if the ransom were paid. Which made it absolutely essential that he decipher Henry's message, and quickly.

"It couldn't be a very complicated code," said Helen. "I mean, even if he's had some time to think about it—"

"I believe, my dear, that it's one of the most elementary of all types of secret writing—what the experts would describe as a monoalphabetic, uniliteral, substitution cipher. Or put more simply, a message in which symbols—in this case, the numbers from 1 to 26—have been substituted for the 26 letters of the alphabet. Notice the way Henry has spelled out certain numbers, written others in figures, and set down still others, like '15 thousand, 7 hundred,' as a combination of both figure and word.

"Now, we are all creatures of habit, Helen, and no one, certainly not an investment counselor like your husband, would jump back and forth like that between words and figures unless he was doing so deliberately, and for a reason. And Henry's reason, I am confident, was because certain numbers—as in fifty thousand dollars, for instance, and forty-eight hours—were necessary if his note was to make sense to his abductors, who would certainly read it before delivering it to you; but to have included them as figures

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would have fouled up his substitution cipher. And since the figures he *has* used are all under 26, I'm virtually certain that each one stands for a letter of the alphabet."

"But how in the world can we tell *which* letters?"

Ponsonby frowned at the note in his hand. "If this were a somewhat longer message, we could base our cryptanalysis on the frequency of the letters. But in a message containing only 18 figures, we're going to have to know the key."

"The key?"

"A number-substitution cipher is generally keyed to a specific passage or quotation in which the letters of the alphabet are numbered in the order in which they first appear. If both sender and recipient have a copy of the key, it can even be a thousand-page book; they simply have to know at exactly what point to begin counting the letters, and sooner or later every letter of the alphabet is bound to turn up.

"But if the various parties to the intrigue have to carry the key in their heads, then obviously it has to be something relatively short. I recall, when I was a boy, a group of us formed a secret society in which we sent secret messages to one another, and our key was that old favorite of typing instructors, current even then: 'The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.' In that key, *t* would be 1, *h* would be 2, *e* would be 3, and so on."

"But how in the world are we ever going to figure out what key Henry used? I mean, it could be anything! A book, a magazine—"

"I think not, my dear. Here in his postscript he's made it a point to tell us that this piece of shopping bag was the *only* paper in the room; in other words, there were no books or magazines lying about, which means that the key to his cipher has to be something he knows by heart. As to *what* that is, I rather imagine he's told us in the first three figures—15, 7, and 21. He says, 'With that to start with, the rest should come easy.'

"Now I would venture to say there is only one book in the Western world in which one could hope to guide someone else to a specific section, a specific chapter, even a specific sentence, with just three numbers. So even though Henry's well-known antipathy toward religion makes it seem unlikely that he would ever have committed any significant portion of the Bible—"

"But he has!" Helen pushed eagerly onto the edge of her chair. "Henry's parents died when he was very young and he was raised by old-fashioned grandparents who simply lived and breathed

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religion. They even made him stay in his room on Sundays after church until he'd memorized a whole chapter of the Bible and could recite it letter-perfect—even the chapters with all the 'begats.' And although he doesn't like to talk about it, maybe he *can* still remember—"

Ponsonby had risen from his chair and crossed to the bookshelf. "These pious grandparents were Protestants?"

"Yes. Some sort of Pentecostal church."

"Then we'll assume it was the King James version he was forced to memorize. Let's see—the 15th book of the Old Testament is *Ezra*, then we want the 7th chapter, the 21st verse—yes, here it is." And Ponsonby read aloud:

"'*And I, even I Artaxerxes the King, do make a decree to all the treasurers which are beyond the river, that whatsoever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, shall require of you, it be done speedily.*'

"Remarkable," he said after he had studied it a few moments. "A single 43-word Biblical verse which contains every letter of the alphabet but one. There is no *j*, but Henry could easily have counted *j* as number 26 if he had needed to use it in his message."

"Please," said Helen, "what *is* his message?"

Ponsonby sat down at his desk, took a sheet of paper, and quickly listed the letters of the alphabet in the order in which they appeared in the verse, adding *j* to the end of his list. He then numbered them in that same order—*a* as 1, *n* as 2, *d* as 3, *i* as 4, and so on, all the way to *j* as 26. Finally, he used the resulting cipher to translate the 18 figures in Henry Scott's ransom note into a string of 18 letters:

SXMINOQYLKRDYWFMHS

Helen had crossed the room to stand at his shoulder. "But it's just gibberish!" she cried.

"I wonder," mused Ponsonby. "These words near the end of Henry's note—'*always, just . . . two.*' Perhaps he was telling us something there. Suppose we divide his message into groups of two, like this—" And hastily Ponsonby jotted down a new line of letters:

SX MI NO QY LK RD YW FM HS

"But it *still* doesn't make any sense!" cried Helen.

"Are you certain of that, my dear? Three of these combinations are common abbreviations—MI for *mile*, NO for *north*, and RD for *road*."

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"And I suppose SX could be *six*," ventured Helen.

"Of course! 'Six miles north—' "

"Of *Quincy!*" offered Helen eagerly.

"And on *Lake Road*," added Ponsonby. "That's State Route 99, and six miles north would be almost to the Clover City turnoff." He frowned. "But there's nothing out there—only a few—by thunder that could be it! FM and HS could stand for *farmhouse*, and YW could be—yes, by heaven, *yellow!* Because there *is* a deserted yellow farmhouse out there, off to the right in a grove of trees just before you reach the Clover City turnoff.

"I'll get Chief Decker on the phone right now, Helen; he'll know whom to call, and the County Sheriff can organize a raiding party and have Henry's abductors in custody even before dawn."

"If only they haven't hurt him!"

"I don't believe you need to worry on that score, my dear. They'll scarcely have chosen to saddle themselves with a murder until they know it's going to be worth the risk—which means not until after they've collected the ransom and are free to clear out. I'm virtually certain Henry will be found safe and sound. But why don't you just stay on here until we've heard from the police? I'm sure Mrs. Garvey will be happy to fix us—"

"A nice pot of tea," said that good woman, surging through the doorway with a heavily laden tray. "There's nothing in this world quite so comforting in the hour of sorrow as a nice hot cup of tea!"

"Q"

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE HARDCOVERS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Butterworth, Michael	THE BLACK LOOK	Doubleday & Co.	$4.95	5/19
Cory, Desmond	EVEN IF YOU RUN	Doubleday & Co.	4.95	5/12
Creasey, John	LAME DOG MURDER	World Publishing	5.95	5/24
Forbes, Stanton	BUT I WOULDN'T WANT TO DIE THERE	Doubleday & Co.	4.95	5/5
Francis, Dick	BONECRACK	Harper & Row	5.95	5/3

Titles and Data Supplied by the Publishers

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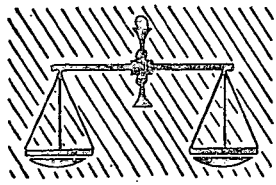

THE JURY BOX

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

This month, the year's halfway mark, we celebrate two first-rate detective novels, one roaring spy thriller and one study in Sherlockian biography which will hold particular fascination for any reader who admires the greatest sleuth of them all.

In *The Longer the Thread* by Emma Lathen (Simon & Schuster, $5.95), once more the business judgment of the Sloan Guaranty Trust must be vindicated by John Putnam Thatcher, senior vice-president and all-purpose detective.

They have backed Harry Zimmerman, Seventh Avenue garment manufacturer, whose American plant hums at high prosperity but whose accident-plagued new factory in Puerto Rico (sabotage, no doubt?) seems headed for a smash. Thatcher arrives to investigate; the suspected saboteur, Foreman Benito Dominguez, is nastily slain on premises to which few have access.

Then festival, holocaust, and more murder. Caught up into it are Norma Lippert, Harry Zimmerman's sister; David, her moody husband; conscientious Cesar Aguilera; a raucous student agitator called Prudencio; Annie Galiano, engaging female labor leader trusted both by labor and management alike. Since Miss Lathen plays fair, study the evidence; make sure the author is really saying what she seems to be saying. Legitimate misdirection may obscure but can't hide the essential clue to a murder mystery both ingenious and terrifying from the first whisper in Wall Street to that last grisly plunge from the battlements. Here's Thatcher at his best.

By sheer accidental cussedness Paul Kruger's *The Bronze Claws* (Simon & Schuster, $4.95) was issued by the same firm which published the Emma Lathen novel above. This can't be helped; I must take what comes, and play 'em as they're dealt.

Phil Kramer, Colorado's young lawyer-investigator, here tackles a case which seems to make no sense. In his search for the missing brother of beautiful if improbably named Holly Wood, our young lawyer races from business community to hippie haunt, from the home of Dr. David Castle to a burnt-out mountain retreat where Dr. Castle himself seems to have died by accident in the fire. The

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doctor's widow, though she has collected half-million-dollar insurance, still lives as though pressed for cash and won't marry the man she so clearly wants.

Allowing fraud, of what sort and by whom? "Paul Kruger," as in four previous books, has striven not only for the twist, but for a double and even triple twist to bring down the curtain. Whether you anticipate these shocks or are flummoxed by them, you should enjoy every page along the way.

For cloak-and-dagger capers against an exotic background, you won't do better than the espionage seesaw of Berkely Mather's *The Terminators* (Scribners, $5.95).

Almost throwing away its third-person prologue, in which a Miami-bound jet is hijacked to Havana by unidentified pirates for a purpose unexplained, this bullet-spattered chronicle shifts to the first person and to India's northern frontier at the very crux of trouble.

Idwal Rees, Britain's secret agent-narrator, must seize and bring back a Russian defector, Palinovsky of the K.G.B., on whom every side in the cold war wants to lay hands. Rees must do this despite obstacles provided by his own immediate boss, the unspeakable Gaffer, and by his strong-minded *inamorata*, Claire Culverton.

The author, formerly a British officer stationed in India, has captured native character as well as native atmosphere. And it all works out, if in no anticipated way. Palinovsky is packed off to America; Claire bids Rees a final good-bye; and, since all our sympathies have been with him, it's a very happy ending.

Whatever your feelings towards Sherlock Holmes and Dr. John H. Watson, so long associated at 221B Baker Street, you will welcome *The Histrionic Holmes*, by Marvin Kaye (Luther Norris, $4.00).

You may be one of those omniscient scholars who offhand can answer any canonical question: "Where was 126B?" for instance. Or you may retain from boyhood only vague, pleasurable memories of deductions by gaslight and hansoms rattling through the fog.

But all human beings love disguise. This study of Holmes's offstage roles—"You would have made an actor, and a rare one," declared Inspector Athelney Jones—is more than compendium or analysis; it is a practical handbook of the whole subject. If I cannot accept the suggestion that Holmes impersonated still another character from a different saga, Mr. Kaye's urbane, reasoned book has one more justification; it is good entertainment on its own.

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NO MOTIVE

by THEODORE MATHIESON

"Murder is like war," said former police inspector McGregor, putting down his wine glass. "The causes are both fundamental and immediate. Fundamental causes may lie dormant, like gunpowder, until a flash touches them off. The flash is the immediate cause. For instance, in the First World War, German imperialism is held to be the fundamental cause; Sarajevo was the flash, or immediate cause."

"You were talking about murder," I reminded my old friend. It was Saturday evening, and in these latter years we usually spent it having dinner.

"Yes, I was," McGregor said. "Let's say a man is jealous of his wife. His jealousy can smolder for years and perhaps never come to anything; yet if he catches his wife *in flagrante delicto* it may trigger not only suicide but multiple murder. The visual impact of infidelity is the immediate cause."

"Seems fairly obvious."

"It isn't always. Take the Reynolds case, for example, which I handled some years ago. Do you recall it?"

"I don't think so."

"Mrs. Reynolds and her husband, who apparently had been happily married for twenty-five years, were simply talking quietly, without emotion, in her greenhouse, where she was pruning a plant. Suddenly, without any warning, Reynolds seized a pair of scissors and plunged it into her throat."

"Was he jealous of her?"

"No. They got on together famously."

"Was he after her money?"

"No."

"Then there was another woman?"

"Yes, there was, but that wasn't the problem, not exactly. Reynolds—Leslie was his first name—had fallen in love with a younger woman and wanted to marry her. Mrs. Reynolds was perfectly willing for him to do so."

"Then why in heaven's name did he kill her?"

"A delicate point, and you have to understand the background of their marriage to appreciate it. Mrs. Reynolds fell desperately in love with Leslie in their undergraduate years at the University. She was the

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daughter of Hugh McCallen, the multimillionaire who made his money in Pan American Oil, and who died shortly after their marriage, so that she came into a large fortune. Leslie was an artist just marking time at the University, with no goal ahead, when she married him. From all I've heard, it was a warm affair, and the couple hit it off beautifully."

"I think I see," I said. "She made him take up responsibilities in the oil business when he really wanted to paint."

"Not at all. She encouraged him to do exactly as he pleased, and for some years they traveled around the world, he with his box of paints and easel, and she simply doting on him. Then she got pregnant, but the child died stillborn, and she wasn't able to have more. After that her interests began to change. She became more concerned with her status in society, began to subscribe to causes, like the philharmonic, began to give teas for the literati—things of that sort."

"And began to neglect Leslie?"

"Quite the contrary. Her inability to have children made her very maternal towards him. There wasn't anything he wanted he couldn't have. For a while he fanatically collected coins and stamps, then he turned to publishing folios of his own paintings. The publishing never really came to anything, but he had fun, and they lived in perfect domestic harmony."

"Then why on earth did he murder her?"

"We're coming to that. For the last five years before her death Mrs. Reynolds, tiring of social activities, began to take up hobbies—like ceramics, weaving, and the cultivation of bonsai, those Japanese miniature trees, you know. Perhaps *then* her maternal concern over Leslie relaxed a bit—not so you could notice it much, but enough to give Leslie's eyes time to wander. They lit on a young society deb, Patricia Starr. A beauty she was. He was forty-something and she only eighteen, but they fell deeply in love. Then he went to Mrs. Reynolds and told her.

" 'Are you sure this is what you really want?' she asked him.

" 'I've never been surer of anything in my life,' he said.

" 'Very well. I've never denied you anything, as you know. You may have Patricia, but you will have to support her yourself. You won't get a penny from me.'

"Well, Reynolds told me later he was overjoyed. He kissed his wife and thanked her,

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and ran off to tell Patricia the good news. They planned for their marriage and their honeymoon, and then Patricia's parents got wind of his intentions. The parents faced Reynolds with the poser of how he was going to support Patricia in the style to which she was accustomed.

"Well, that stopped Reynolds cold. He'd always had plenty of money, but he didn't have a dime of his own, and the fact he'd have to earn a luxurious living for Patricia just never occurred to him. Mr. Starr, knowing it was a bad deal for his daughter, put his foot down. He sent Patricia off to Europe with her mother, then told Reynolds to return to his wife and settle down.

"But Leslie was determined to marry Patricia. He went back to his wife, found her in the greenhouse, and asked her if she'd give him a settlement so he could get started with Patricia."

"She refused him," I said, "so he killed her."

"Quite wrong. She relented and said she'd give him a hundred thousand."

"Then why in the world—?"

"Wait. Leslie wrote Patricia, who was now in Paris, about his good fortune. But she wrote back that she had reconsidered, and unless he could support her with money of his *own*, everything was over between them. He was frantic. He flew to Paris, saw her in spite of her mother's attempts to prevent him, but Patricia stuck to her guns. Which left him no hope, you see. What could he do at his age? He wasn't trained for anything practical. He had no business connections. He'd built nothing of his own. So he came back brooding on his misfortune, feeling impotent as a man, feeling humiliated and defeated."

"Now I understand," I said. "He'd built up a murderous resentment against his wife for so mothering him that she'd suppressed his manhood."

"That was the fundamental cause, but the murder needn't have happened, you know. There had to be the immediate cause."

"And what was that?"

"Reynolds only told me much later. 'I was about to walk away and leave my wife alone in the greenhouse,' he said, 'when I saw what she was doing with the little pine tree, cutting away half its roots to keep it small, and suddenly I knew she'd done the same with me, *deliberately*, over the years—had deliberately kept me small, and that I would never grow any more than the bonsai. That's why I killed her.' "

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a *NEW* crime story by

JANE SPEED

Jane Speed's special and personal milieu is the big-city apartment house. What usually happens inside an urban apartment house—that human beehive, that modern cliff dwelling—is so routine, so humdrum, so everyday-normal that we tend to think of apartment-house living as lacking in drama, as not offering the stuff of stories. But, as the saying goes, still waters run deep . . . Jane Speed has a wonderful eye for detail—her sidelights and deft touches ring true . . . Read now about "the last busy days of a random victim" . . .

THE EVENTS BETWEEN

by JANE SPEED

Nobody had to tell the residents of this small west-side apartment house that crime was on the increase. Far too many had encountered it first-hand on the streets or in the subway; all read of it daily in the newspapers, shook their heads, and frequently wondered aloud what the world was coming to.

And on a Wednesday in April, Mrs. Louise Romer, a very organized lady who made it a point to get up an hour early one morning each week to do her wash before she left for work, went down as usual to the basement laundry room. Within minutes Mrs. Romer, visibly shaken, appeared at the door of the superintendent's first-floor apartment to report that the coin boxes on the washing machines had been broken open and emptied. Almost as unsettling to the aggrieved tenants was the workaday view the police seemed to take later of their misfortune. "We see a lot of this," was the terse comment. "These coin boxes are a favorite target of junkies." So crime had invaded even this tidy preserve.

The chastening experience

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drew the building's occupants briefly closer and for several days they paused often to commiserate with one another about it. But such fearful nothings as "You just never know" soon gave way to the more philosophical "It could have been worse." The building was still here, the tenants were still here, there were new coin boxes on the machines; if all was not right with the world it was at least no more wrong than they'd come to expect.

Other matters arose to claim their attention—old Mr. Watford died, the Kestenbaums' Sandra went off to join a commune, the Jacobys began fighting again. In time the "laundry room incident" passed out of their conversation and lodged in the back of their minds as just one more small worrying fact of urban life.

In the last week of October, what with one thing and another, it was Friday before the orderly Mrs. Romer managed to get up early to do her wash. And shortly after her purposeful descent to the basement the poor woman was once again ringing the superintendent's bell.

Mr. Bexley opened the door, rather ostentatiously buttoning his shirt—a small mark of displeasure at being disturbed at this hour; but one look at Mrs. Romer's face and his annoyance fled.

"Mr. Bexley." Her voice was unnaturally high and her manner oddly formal. "I'm afraid someone's been at the coin boxes again. Only this time—" her careful control nearly failed her—"this time they've killed Mrs. Watford!"

And the scene in the basement graphically bore out Mrs. Romer's grim announcement. The old lady lay where she had fallen in the doorway to the laundry room, the right side of her head slightly sunken, the hair darkly matted. The wicker basket she had been carrying had rolled on into the room scattering her undone wash across the floor.

The intruder had been thwarted this time in his attempt to break open the coin boxes—but at what a price! Poor old soul, it could have been anyone who walked through that door, but it just happened to be Mrs. Watford. The police and the tenants shook their heads over the cruel senselessness of it all. Another random victim . . .

Mrs. Watford lost her husband late in May and everybody thought it was just wonderful the way she bore up.

"Oh, I do miss my poor Walter." The words invariably

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set her voice perilously atremble and clouded those bright eyes with a mist of honest tears. But not for long. It just wasn't like Eunice Watford to sit around and mope. As Walter himself had been fond of saying, "Keep busy. That's the ticket."

And so she did.

Just at first the evenings had been hardest to fill. Oh, not Thursdays, of course; for years now, except for those upsetting few days when the machines were put out of service by some brazen thief, Mrs. Watford had done her wash every Thursday evening. There were only the two washers and two dryers for the entire building, which meant that the laundry room was in almost constant use during the day. And since Mrs. Watford's legs gave her a bit of trouble she didn't care to stand around waiting for a machine. So she came down late Thursday evening when the laundry room was empty and popped her things right in as nice as you please.

The reason for Thursday evenings? Ah-h, that was a habit she cherished from the time when dear Walter was still with her. She always washed his shirts on Thursday evening, then starched and ironed them on Friday so he'd be sure to have a fresh one to wear to his birdwatching club on Saturday morning. Such a handsome man Walter had been and so particular about his dress right up to the last.

However, apart from the comforting bustle of that Thursday evening ritual, Mrs. Watford found the evenings rather empty—and oppressively long. Well, then. How to make them shorter? Why, go to bed earlier!

And so she did.

Now it was simply second nature to Eunice Watford to cross her bedroom in the dark and pull down the window-shade before she turned on a light. That was the way she had been brought up, the way every nice girl in her day had been brought up. And if she took to lingering a few moments at the window to look across the court that separated the two wings of the building into the lighted windows of other apartments, she did so with no mischief aforethought. This building was her home, and her proprietary interest in all its workings extended to each and every person who happened to reside within its walls. When, now and then, she witnessed some fragment of domestic discord, she watched anxiously the next evening to see how it turned out.

Sparked by these touches of

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suspense, Mrs. Watford's "moments" in the dark grew imperceptibly longer until at last she was obliged to relocate the cretonne-covered chair to a position near the window, so as to relieve the strain on her poor old legs. And quite by chance, on a rainy Sunday when she was cleaning out the hall closet, she came across Walter's bird-watching glasses tucked away on the back of a shelf. *Such* a lucky find, for there was no denying her poor old eyes weren't what they used to be.

From her window Mrs. Watford had a really good view into only two apartments: the Romers' directly across the way and the Jacobys' on the floor below. The widowed Louise Romer and her son Shelton had lived in the building since he was quite a small boy and Mrs. Watford thought the world of them both, of course. But it was more often the Jacobys, whom she hardly knew at all, who captured her attention.

They were a decent-looking couple and very quiet-spoken when you met them going in or out of the building. But once inside their apartment they were like two different people, constantly at each other hammer and tongs.

Well, no, that wasn't quite true—not *all* the time. It was the oddest thing about the Jacobys' quarreling, it followed a kind of pattern. It would start out as just bickering—nothing you'd take much notice of except perhaps in the summer when the windows were open. And then, night after night, it got louder and angrier until suddenly one night there would be absolute quiet and you'd know that Mrs. Jacoby had packed up and gone off again—to her sister's in Boston, Mrs. Watford had learned from the superintendent's wife.

Then after a week or so she'd come back and they'd seem to get on very well for a while. But before long the whole thing would start all over again. Three or four times a year it happened. "Like the seasons," Walter used to say. It had got to be a kind of joke between them. Whenever the Jacobys' current round of discord neared its climax Walter would remark, "Well, I hear Mrs. Jacoby is planning another trip to Boston."

So between the peppery Jacobys and the placid Romers, Mrs. Watford's evenings were quite nicely taken up.

Afternoons were never a problem: Mrs. Watford always spent a gratifying three hours watching the procession of heart-tugging daytime serials or television.

And the mornings were the

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best time of all. Every fine morning Mrs. Watford, humming a nondescript little tune, bobbed down the block and across Riverside Drive to the park. There she settled herself on her favorite bench where she was soon joined by her new friend, Miss Follansbee.

The two ladies had taken to each other at once, sensing a certain mutual refinement and, perhaps, a mutual need. Edith Follansbee's life had also recently undergone a major change; she had retired in June after forty years of schoolteaching. But by far the most compelling attraction was the private belief of each that she compared advantageously to the other. Graciousness never flows so sweetly as toward a person to whom one feels slightly but safely superior. Thus Miss Follansbee, a good ten years younger and a clear intellectual cut above Mrs. Watford, could afford to be indulgent about the dear old soul's tendency to dress in a manner most unsuited to her age . . . while Mrs. Watford, who had been something of a beauty, charitably overlooked poor Edith's drabness and lack of style. It probably wouldn't have helped anyhow; the dear girl was so hopelessly plain.

So it became a regular thing. They met every morning on the same bench and passed a pleasant hour or so talking—about the shocking behavior of the young, about the way the neighborhood was changing, and, with the melancholy relish of survivors, about the proud and well-favored people who had fallen on bad times or were (only think of it!) quite dead and gone . . . until at last the bouncing balls, childish squeals, and clanging pulltoys became too prevalent to be ignored.

One mild morning in October it was Miss Follansbee who arrived at the park first. She settled herself on the bench and opened her book. Edith Follansbee always carried a book, partly as a badge of her intellectual status but more as a kind of shield against appearing lonely or at loose ends. So Mrs. Watford had crossed the Drive and was almost upon her before Edith looked up.

"Oh, my!" she fairly gasped. "Aren't you a picture!"

Indeed, this morning Mrs. Watford was a study in nearly matching yellows—yellow polka-dot blouse, yellow wrap-around skirt, yellow-patterned stockings, yellow space shoes.

She sat down beside her friend and turned one foot in its molded shoe from side to side critically. "I'd never seen them in these pretty colors before," she remarked with

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complacent approval. "He could have made them up for me in pink, you know, but I thought that might be a bit—"

"Oh, quite." Edith closed the matter firmly and hastened on to the news she was bursting to tell. "Her husband is suing for divorce!"

It was Mrs. Watford's turn to gasp. "Then you were right all along!"

"Well," said Edith modestly, "I just found it *very* hard to believe that man was her brother. Why, they didn't look the least bit alike."

For several weeks their conversation had been dominated by the questionable behavior of a woman who lived in Miss Follansbee's building. Now, their most scandalized speculations confirmed, they fell to going over how they'd spotted all the early signs. Altogether a most satisfactory morning. For Edith, at any rate.

Mrs. Watford, seeing her own contributions dwindle and stale in comparison to Edith's triumphant specifics, found her enjoyment tempered by prickings of envy. And she made her way home afterward feeling just a mite put out with her fellow tenants for being such an uninteresting lot. But one must make do with what one has. So perhaps, if she kept her eyes and ears open—

The fugitive little hope grew and strengthened as she followed her television friends from crisis to crisis through another afternoon. Surely now, she told herself, in a building this size there must be *someone* up to *something*. And at that almost mystically opportune moment a voice from the small screen proclaimed, "Everyone has a secret."

Armed with this exhilarating insight, Mrs. Watford began diligently searching her memory for telltale little particulars she might have missed in recent conversations with her neighbors. There had not been a great many; most of the old friends were gone, one way or another, and the newer people always seemed to be in such a hurry. But just last Saturday now, down in the lobby, she had spoken to several of the ladies in the building. Frowning in concentration Mrs. Watford tried to recall the occasion detail by detail . . .

When Mrs. Watford had come back from the park she found Mrs. Kestenbaum at the mailboxes.

"Damn!" muttered the outspoken Mrs. K. as she scraped a knuckle in the process of extricating the mail from her box. "And all junk," she commented as she shuffled through the daily yield. "Oh—

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morning, Mrs. Watford."

Mrs. Watford had murmured a polite acknowledgement, then busied herself with taking out her own mail.

Mrs. Watford's natural ebullience always came to a perplexed halt in the presence of this tall, rather bent-faced woman. Everyone knew how badly the Kestenbaum children had turned out: Ronald had long since taken up residence in the East Village and now even Sandra—and she had always seemed such a *sweet* little thing—had departed for heaven knows what kind of sordid existence. Yet Mrs. Kestenbaum treated the whole thing with a disconcerting jocularity. "It's a question of survival," she had explained cheerfully. "The battered parent syndrome, you know." All very *brave* perhaps, but it did rather nip in the bud any sympathy one might offer. And what else *was* there to offer in the circumstances? Mrs. Watford just never knew what line to take with the woman.

So she was immensely grateful for the diverson provided by Louise Romer who came in the front door just then with her shopping cart. Dear dependable Louise. A person was always on safe ground inquiring about *her* son.

"Ah!" exclaimed Mrs. Watford, eyeing the load of groceries. "Sheldon must be coming home in time for his birthday."

"Well," Louise conceded with her usual caution, "his plane is due at Kennedy in about an hour." *So*, her tone implied, *if the plane hasn't been hijacked and if it doesn't have to circle over the airport for hours and if it doesn't crash land, Sheldon just might get home in time for his birthday.* Dear Louise. She probably worried a bit *too* much. But it was certainly preferable to Mrs. Kestenbaum's unseemly insouciance. Well, just compare the results.

Louise took the mail out of her box and sorted through it. Then her normally strained expression softened into a near smile as she held up an envelope addressed to Sheldon in Mrs. Watford's unmistakable Spencerian script.

"You never forget his birthday. Not once in all the years we've lived here."

"Oh," Mrs. Watford protested, "it's just a little thing." Then, to cover her pleased confusion, she asked quickly, "Where was he off to this time?"

"Beirut. His company just opened a branch there. They sent Sheldon to take charge of getting it operating smoothly."

"Imagine that!" bubbled

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Mrs. Watford. "All that responsibility and he's only going to be twenty-seven. Isn't he a wonder?" In her enthusiasm she'd half directed this last to Mrs. Kestenbaum before she realized the awkward implication.

But Mrs. Kestenbaum just smiled her rakish smile and replied heartily, "Oh, indeed he is. Why, Sheldon seems almost too good to be true."

Which *sounded* friendly enough, but . . . Mrs. Watford gave it up. She never would understand the woman and that was that. She turned back to Louise. "Well, do give Sheldon my love and tell him to stop by to see me if he has time. Any evening but Thursday. That's my laundry night, you know."

"I'm sure he hasn't forgotten that."

"Oh, Mrs. Kestenbaum." It was Mrs. Bexley, the superintendent's wife. "My husband checked the Jacobys' apartment and found the cause of your leak. Seems Mr. Jacoby got up this morning and started running himself a bath and he lay back down and went to sleep. It was a mess, but it's all cleaned up now."

"Well, I'm glad it was nothing worse. A little hung over, was he?"

"I wouldn't be surprised. I think he's been drowning his sorrow pretty regularly since she left."

Mrs. Kestenbaum heaved a gusty sigh. "I hate to wish him bad luck but, between you and me, I hope she stays a while this time. We really take the brunt of the noise living right under them. That last bout nearly brought down the ceiling."

"Well—" Mrs. Bexley lowered her voice—"I *think* she may be gone for good."

"He said that?"

"Oh, no, not him. But you know how she usually just throws a few things in a suitcase and storms out. Well, this time, just a day or so after that last big fight"— Mrs. Bexley raised her eyebrows significantly— "the expressman came and picked up her trunk."

The expressman came and picked up her trunk.

When Mrs. Watford first heard those words she'd felt no more than a faint disappointment to think that the scene at the Jacobys' window was going to be as uniformly dull as the one at the Romers' . . .

But now, in the light of her newfound purpose, she began to wonder. She thought back over all the bits and pieces of the Jacobys' altercations she had witnessed. For, of course, it was only snatches she ever managed to see; the quarreling

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usually began in the kitchen—so bad for the digestion—but always seemed, frustratingly, to finish elsewhere. So she never really knew *what* went on after they moved out of view. Good heavens! Was it possible—

The breathtaking thought snagged for a moment on the inconvenient fact that it was *Mrs.* Jacoby who had the violent temper. But wait now—hadn't Mrs. Watford often said to Edith, "*One of these days she's going to push that poor patient man too far.*" By the time Mrs. Watford took up her post at the window that evening she was so keyed up she could hardly hold the binoculars steady.

Mr. Jacoby was standing by the sink with his back to the window. Mrs. Watford's eyebrows lifted as she saw him drain the glass in his hand and promptly make himself another drink. He *was* drinking more than usual. Abruptly then he turned and came over to sit at the table by the window. Mrs. Watford gasped. Why, how could she not have noticed before? He looked terrible! With a mixture of elation and dismay she studied that haggard face—the face, she no longer had the slightest doubt, of a man who had killed his wife and then stuffed her body into a trunk.

Flushed with the excitement of her discovery, Mrs. Watford rested the binoculars on the window sill and let her thoughts race ahead. Poor Edith and her run-of-the-mill little divorce gossip. Just wait till she heard about this! And Mrs. Watford began busily shaping her story. But the more she thought about it the more uncertain she became of Edith's reaction. Edith did have a very school-teacherish way of trying to pin a person down to specifics.

What was needed was something more definite. Mrs. Watford trained the binoculars on Mr. Jacoby again. He had pushed aside his half-eaten dinner and sat staring out the window. Really, he looked so pathetic. Perhaps if she could talk to him he might confide in her. For a minute it seemed quite feasible; through the glasses he looked so close she felt she could reach out and touch him.

But the instant she set the glasses down the illusion vanished. She'd barely ever spoken two words to the man. Why, she didn't even know his first name. All it said on the mailbox was D. Jacoby.

The mailbox! Of course! She'd write him a note. Just a little message to let him know, in a nice way, that *someone* was aware of his present difficulty.

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It might be rather a comfort to him. And it certainly ought to stir him to some kind of revealing action.

The next day was another rainy Sunday, but Mrs. Watford didn't mind at all. She sat right down at her desk and all through the morning and most of the afternoon she tried and discarded one phrase after another. It was nearly five o'clock before she rose, satisfied at last that she'd achieved just the right tone. The message was very brief. "Dear Friend," it read. "Have no fear. Your secret is safe with me." And it was signed, with tactful anonymity, "A Wellwisher."

Now that it was finished she was eager to get it into the mail. But the rain was coming down harder than ever and the forecast promised no relief till morning. She considered just nipping down to the lobby and putting the note directly into the Jacoby mailbox. But, of course, if she did that he would know for sure that his interested sympathizer lived in the building. He might even—no, best wait till morning. Mrs. Watford sought no credit for her thoughtfulness; she merely wanted to observe the effects of it.

So she contented herself with taking the note out of its envelope from time to time to admire her handiwork—really, the more she read it the better she liked it. And a little later she looked in on Mr. Jacoby, again toying listlessly with his food in glum solitude. "Never you mind," murmured Mrs. Watford. "You'll soon have something to make you sit up and take notice."

And for one startled moment she thought he must have heard her. His lackluster eyes widened, his mouth fell open, and he stood up so suddenly he knocked over his chair. Then into his welcoming arms swept a live and penitent Mrs. Jacoby.

Mrs. Watford's glasses remained riveted on the couple. But the touching reconciliation—at last a scene played out in full range of her vision—which on any ordinary day she would have counted a thrilling high point in her evening viewing, was utterly lost on her.

As the numbness of shock began to wear off she let the glasses fall into her lap. She looked about her rather dazedly and her eye caught a white rectangle showing dimly on her desk. Her lovely note! A whole day's work for nothing. Sniffing back a tear she rose, picked up the envelope, and carried it to the living room. She turned on the lamp by the rocker, sat down, and tenderly pulled out her creation.

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It really *was* a lovely note. What a shame that nobody else would ever see it now. She rocked for a minute and thought about that, then looked at the note again. Actually it could apply to anybody; she'd taken great pains not to make it too specific. *Everyone has a secret.* All she'd have to do was address a fresh envelope—

She bounced up and scurried back to the bedroom window. With barely a glance at the traitorous Jacobys—thank goodness she hadn't wasted her nice note on *them*—Mrs. Watford aimed her glasses at the Romers. She lingered a minute at the kitchen where she could see Louise frosting a cake, then pressed on to the living room to focus on the real object of her quest. Of course, when Sheldon had stopped in to thank her for the birthday card, he'd seemed as clean-cut and straightforward as ever. And now, watching television, he certainly gave no sign of harboring any dark secret. But was he, perhaps, *too good to be true?* That odd remark of Mrs. Kestenbaum's kept coming back. Naturally one couldn't set much store by anything *she* said. Still—a young man—always off to foreign places—why, even Sheldon must have sown a few wild oats.

Her mind made up, Mrs. Watford pulled down her shade and turned on a light. A few minutes later the note was snug inside a newly addressed envelope, all sealed and stamped and ready to mail. And even if it didn't produce quite the effect she'd originally hoped for, Mrs. Watford was sure Sheldon would enjoy it. Her eyes sparkled as she recalled how, when he was still a boy, she used to sign his birthday cards "Your Secret Pal." Young people love a little mystery, you know. Oh, what she wouldn't give to see his face when he opened *this.*

When Louise Romer's alarm clock rang an hour early on Friday morning she jabbed it off and glared at it as though it were a harbinger of doom. She had not slept well and she closed her eyes for a moment, wavering—mightn't it be better, after all, if she just let— No. In one determined motion she swung herself up and out of bed. Louise had found life largely a succession of more or less unpleasant tasks. She was not about to shirk one at this late date.

Once up she moved quickly —and quietly—so as not to wake Sheldon. He'd got home quite late last night, which was one of the reasons she'd slept poorly. To this day she couldn't get to

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sleep till he came in. She'd bite off her tongue, of course, before she'd let him know that or ask where he'd been, but she couldn't help worrying. And these last two weeks had been something special, even for Louise.

Too good to be true. That's what had started it. On a rational level Louise knew perfectly well that Mrs. Kestenbaum's offensive little remark was simply born of envy. Yet it chilled her to the core, opening up a whole new field of worry.

Where her son was concerned, Louise was a chronic and inventive worrier, anticipating any rude surprises that fate might have in store. And she thought she'd covered all the possibilities. But—*too good to be true?* This treasure, this joy, this one true achievement of her life—this *stranger?* Oh, how she yearned sometimes for the days when every facet of his eager growing mind was still open to her.

On his homecoming he'd encountered, after all, no more than a slight delay in getting through customs. And her worry had vanished at the sight of him. Surely he was what he seemed—every inch the handsome, capable, affectionate son she was so rightly envied for.

She had cooked one of his favorite meals for the homecoming dinner and they had lingered over it as he talked about the new branch office, the flight, the bizarre mixup in luggage—in short, she reflected as she washed the dishes afterward, about nothing at all that really mattered. The worry returned and hovered close again.

During the week that followed they saw each other only at breakfast and dinner. But she became convinced that he was more preoccupied than usual. And one evening, careful to keep her tone light, she ventured, "Any problems?"

His reply, just as light, was, "Nothing I can't handle."

Thus gently but firmly rebuffed, she could only wait and watch—and worry.

This past Wednesday she had awakened with a cold and had called the office to say she wouldn't be in. She felt somewhat better as the morning wore on and decided to make use of the day at home by straightening up Sheldon's room. For all his adult competence he hadn't outgrown a boyish messiness.

And as she picked up and sorted out and put away she began, desultorily at first and then almost feverishly, to try to find some clue to the enigma her son had become. Despising herself but unable to resist, she

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even pulled out each drawer and went through it. But the most noteworthy discovery seemed to be how little of a personal nature the room contained, as though Sheldon no longer lived here in any important way.

Then at last, under some bathing trunks he hadn't worn in years, she found an untidy heap of letters. No—her eagerness subsided as she flicked through them—not letters at all, just a bunch of old birthday cards from Mrs. Watford. Imagine his bothering to save them! Of course, the Watfords *had* been very nice to Sheldon when he was a boy. Mr. Watford had often taken him birdwatching, and whenever Sheldon wanted to earn some extra money Mrs. Watford had kindly pretended she needed help with her laundry on Thursday evenings.

Louise carried the cards over to the bed, grateful for even this meager trace of something felt. Starting at the bottom of the pile she looked at one card after another, fondly recalling past birthdays. Oh, dear! There were even some signed "Your Secret Pal." How they'd laughed when Sheldon showed her those! Oh, Mrs. Watford was quite a character.

Still marveling at this unexpected nostalgic streak in her son, Louise pulled out the last one. But this wasn't a birthday card. It was a note.

"Have no fear," she read. "Your secret is safe with me." Instinctively her stomach tightened. Then she read it again, and relaxed a little. It was just from Mrs. Watford, after all; there was no mistaking that handwriting. But why hadn't Sheldon shown her this one? Surely it was the same silly sort of thing as that "Secret Pal" business?

Then it dawned on her and she almost laughed aloud at the obviousness of it. She'd noticed the cards weren't in chronological order. Why, this note must have been sent years ago and the "secret" it referred to was probably a surprise that Sheldon had planned for Mother's Day or for her birthday. *Naturally* he wouldn't have shown it to her, of all people. Shaking her head at her own foolishness, Louise turned the envelope over to look at the postmark. The laughter died out of her. It was dated just two days earlier.

Louise took a deep breath. So. It had come in yesterday's mail. It wasn't some childish relic. And Sheldon hadn't seen fit to say a word to her about it. Not worth mentioning perhaps? Then why had he kept it? Hidden it away, in fact. She

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looked at the note again and smiled a small pained smile. "Your secret is safe with me." Not for long, whatever Mrs. Watford's good intentions. Mrs. Watford was a compulsive gossip; once she started chattering, anything was grist for the mill.

Oh, but it was utterly absurd! That silly old woman couldn't possibly know any "secret" about Sheldon that his own mother didn't know.

Of course Sheldon *had* gone up to see Mrs. Watford after he'd come home. But he always did that; he was very thoughtful that way. And he *had* stayed a little longer than usual—well, the poor old thing was alone now and probably starved for conversation. But surely he would never in this world—oh, *had* he, in some misguided rush of sentiment, confided something in that old fool?

Louise pressed her hand to her eyes, suddenly stung by the recollection of his rebuff to her. "Nothing I can't handle," he'd said.

She rose stiffly and put the note and the cards back where she'd found them. "Well, my son," she said as she closed the drawer, "and just how do you plan to handle this?"

On Friday morning Louise Romer took up her bundle of laundry and resolutely started for the door. But when she came to Sheldon's room she couldn't resist a quick look at her sleeping son. Lying there, one hand flung over his head, he seemed as open and innocent as when his problems were so endearingly small, when she even knew for sure what they were.

Well. Those days were gone. Closed out of his thoughts, out of his life, she could only do what little she knew to do for him and hope for the best. Louise sighed, and got on with the task at hand.

When the elevator door opened at the basement she hesitated and glanced quickly to right and left, a habit she hadn't been able to shake since the morning of that jarring discovery last spring. Then she stepped out, marched past the neat rows of trash cans, turned right to the laundry room—and stopped dead.

Louise closed her eyes, swallowed hard, then opened them again. No, she had not dreamed it; Mrs. Watford was really lying there in the doorway. Louise set her laundry down carefully and forced herself to kneel beside the old woman. The wrist, when she touched it, was cold. Mrs. Watford would talk no more.

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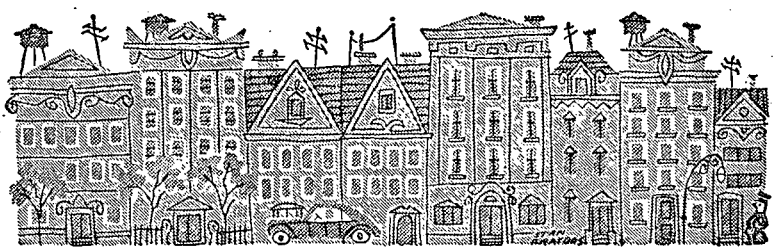
That unpleasant task out of the way, Louise rose to check the details of the setting. She would have much preferred to have attended to all this the night before. But it had not seemed wise to linger in the basement once she had dispatched Mrs. Watford.

Louise took one final, critical look around the laundry room. Satisfied, she then went upstairs to make her prepared announcement.



WHO-DUN-IT

by JANE SPEED

The prime rule of the game, the masters say,
Is to plant each clue with the utmost fair play.
And that is quite as it ought to be.
No once-cheated reader would disagree.

But it's better still to find fair play, too,
Not just in the "dun-it" but in the "who";
To read, not of dolls pulled about by plots,
But of humans tied up in their self-made knots.

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continuing the NEW series of

police procedurals by

LAWRENCE TREAT

Well, there was this worry that Inspector Mitch Taylor and his wife Amy had about Joey's poor marks in school, and what to do about it, and along came this real cutie of a case—what Lieutenant Decker called a lollapaloosa, a humdinger—and Mitch couldn't duck it. But it's funny how things work out—Joey's marks, for Pete's sake! . . .

M AS IN MISSING

by LAWRENCE TREAT

Inspector Mitch Taylor had this paperwork to do, and somehow, when you're sitting there in the squad room with a form in front of you, you start thinking of a bunch of other things. And what Mitch was thinking of mostly was that report card of Joey's. It was pretty bad, and while the kid was no genius, he had a good enough head to get by in school, so why didn't he?

Mitch and Amy put the question up to Joey himself. The kid kind of rubbed the toe of one sneaker against the hole in the other one and made the hole a little bigger. Then, catching on that this wouldn't get him anywhere, he said the trouble was he just couldn't remember stuff too good.

Mitch, who had an A-1 memory, asked the kid who were the top ten batters in the American League last year, and Joey rattled them off like they were part of his own name. After that Mitch told him to go on out and play.

When Joey had beat it, Mitch and Amy talked things over and Amy kept saying the trouble was that Joey wasn't motivated. Mitch said okay, but how do you motivate him? Neither of them had an answer

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to that one, and Mitch was thinking about it while he sat there at the desk and stopped doing his paperwork. And he was still putting off the paperwork when this couple came in.

The way the Homicide Squad worked, you sort of rotated cases when the Lieutenant wasn't around to take charge, which he wasn't, so Mitch got stuck with this one. He told the pair to sit down, and before they even told him what it was all about, he sort of sized them up.

The guy said his name was Gus Hannibal. He had a head that sat low on his shoulders, with not much neck to him, and he had friendly gray eyes over a beak of a nose, and from the dirt under his fingernails Mitch figured he was some kind of a mechanic. And Mitch was dead right on that, on account it turned out Gus was an auto mechanic and owned his own garage, which he would have told you was just about the best one in North America.

He was nuts about this dame with him, Pamela Dover, and she was something to be nuts about, too. She reminded Mitch a little of Amy, the way she moved light and easy and looked like a spring day and made you feel that way, besides. This Pamela, she was dressed up like she'd just come from Paris, and Mitch found out he was right on that one, too.

Gus led off with the story, although it was strictly Pamela's. First off it sounded okay, but after a couple of minutes Mitch sort of wondered. He kept making notes on his pad, chiefly for the sake of form, but he realized that the real problem here was to find himself an out. Because a whopper like this—all about a magic room and a disappearing nut—it made the pair of them sound like a couple of nuts.

The way Mitch usually handled screwball stuff like this was, he said he'd be glad to help out, but he wondered whether this was what they really wanted. Because an investigation like this, particularly for a schoolteacher like he found out this Pamela was, you want to think of how it's going to affect you. There's the nuisance and the worry, and then what about the principal of the school and maybe some of the parents, too—what would happen when they heard about this?

That would have been okay if Pamela had been alone. Except with Gus here who was liable to blow his top and insist on Pamela pushing the charge, with him here, Mitch figured there was maybe a better way.

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He could be all sympathy but point out that this was really precinct stuff, and then he'd give them the address of their neighborhood precinct house and send them up there. And Mitch was all set to do just that until Gus ended up saying Pamela had been shot at and almost killed, and then knocked out. Which made it Homicide Squad business, and something Mitch couldn't kiss off.

Still, Mitch believed only half of what they told him, and while he knew he'd have to do a little investigating he was no eager beaver and so his main problem was still how to get rid of them. Because he was beginning to get an idea of what had really happened, and he saw how he could get the whole thing off his back.

"We'll look into it," he said politely. "But as far as your aunt is concerned, this Bessie Bell, that's not our business. You go down the hall to Missing Persons, second door on the right, and give them the information. They'll take care of you."

That got rid of them, and seeing as how it was a question of either filling out the report that Mitch had started a half hour ago, or else checking on a few simple things that might clear up the whole Dover business, he picked up the phone and went to work on it. When he'd finished it was time to go home, and he left. So it wasn't until the next morning that he talked things over with the boss, Lieutenant Decker.

"I got a real cutie," Mitch said. He was sitting in the Lieutenant's cubbyhole of an office where if you backed up too far you'd knock over all the magazines piled up on the extra chairs. "Here are the names and addresses," Mitch said, sliding the stuff across the desk. "This Dover dame went to Europe on a tour, only the tour went broke and she came back a week early. She claims she walked into her apartment and found it all messed up, and a strange guy in a red shirt sitting there and guzzling beer. Naturally she got kind of upset, and she says the guy pulled a gun on her and then she passed out. Didn't wake up until the next day."

"That was yesterday?" the Lieutenant said, staring at the names.

"That's right," Mitch said. "She wasn't hurt, but she had a headache and the apartment looked exactly like it had before she'd left for Europe. No more mess. She says she checked up on all kinds of details, like where she'd left her cleaning tissues on the night table and whether the dishes

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were all stacked the same way, and everything was in order. Then she called Gus, and the pair of them came over here and asked us to investigate."

"Brother!" Decker said. "Sounds like we got a lollapaloosa!"

"That's only part of it," Mitch said. "She has an aunt out in Sacramento who was supposed to come and live in the apartment while Pamela was away. Name of Bessie Bell. She was due two days after Pamela left, and Gus had promised to meet her at the airport and take her to the apartment. But Gus forgot about her, or else he was busy fixing up somebody's car or something, and it seems like the aunt never showed up at the apartment. Because she didn't answer the phone, and the note Pamela left for her, along with a couple of presents—they were still there when Pamela woke up yesterday. And yet Missing Persons looked into the Bessie Bell business and she *was* on the passenger list of Flight 183, just like she was supposed to be, and she did land here on July second. Then I checked with Sacramento, and she never got back there."

"What do you make of it?" the Lieutenant asked.

"She maybe got rolled and then knocked off," Mitch said. "She had dough and could have been carrying a wad, and you know them gypsy cab drivers out at the airport. But we got no complaint, not yet anyway. So far that's Missing Persons' headache."

"But Pamela and what happened in her apartment," Decker said, "is right in our laps. Assault with a deadly weapon, plus a few other things."

"The way it stacks up," Mitch said, "I figure maybe she picked up a boy friend on the plane and spent the night with him. But if Gus ever finds out she landed yesterday, she's got to explain why she waited a whole day before getting in touch with him, so she made up this story to cover herself. And Gus—anything she tells him, he'll swallow it."

The Lieutenant thought it over before he spoke. "Why don't you go see Pamela and check out this theory of yours? If you're right we can forget about the whole business. If not, we got a humdinger."

Decker swung around slowly, and the swivel chair creaked like it knew what was coming and didn't want any part of it. So Mitch went out without saying another word.

Pamela Dover lived on the second floor of a five-story brick apartment house. Mitch guessed that the rent was

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around two hundred and that the furniture would be in pretty good taste but strictly run-of-the-mill, on account that was all her pocketbook could stand. And inside the joint it looked like he'd hit it right on the head of the nail.

"I've been investigating that story of yours," he said, to kind of make Pamela feel he didn't see through it and was a hundred percent on her side. "You must have been pretty disappointed at coming home a week early. Any of the others come back with you?"

"Some of them stayed on and paid their own expenses for the week, but I flew back with a Mrs. Mercer. We sat together on the plane, and we shared a taxi from the airport. She lives only a couple of blocks away."

"You don't mind if I check up, do you?" Mitch said. "Because details like that, they can be important."

"Please check up on everything," Pamela said. "I wish you would, because I can hardly believe my own story and I don't see why you should. It's so odd."

"Yeah," Mitch said, and he went to the phone. And this Mrs. Mercer, either she was in on it or else you had to forget that idea about a boy friend, and then where were you, huh?

Mitch ran his finger along the top of the telephone. "You dusted the place?" he asked.

Pamela shook her head. "No. I haven't cleaned yet."

"You go away for a month in this town," Mitch said, "and there's dust. And soot. And all that grime."

"Then somebody must have cleaned up," Pamela said, "because the apartment is spotless."

"You said you left a note for your aunt?" Mitch said.

"Yes, it's still there on the kitchen table. You can look."

Mitch went into the small kitchen and spotted it. A note to Aunt Bessie telling her she was welcome and where she could find the sugar and flour and coffee. Stuff like that.

Mitch examined the note and tried to look like it told him something, which it didn't.

He turned around and watched Pamela for a few seconds. Then he asked a brand-new question.

"Got your last electric bill?" he said.

"It's in the desk," Pamela answered. "It came just before I left for Europe, and I haven't paid it yet. Would you like to see it?"

"If it's handy," Mitch said.

She fished it out of a pigeonhole and brought it to him. He looked at the part that gave the last meter reading, and

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then he went outside and checked the present reading for her apartment. 312 kilowatt hours had been used during the past month, which meant somebody had probably lived here while Pamela was away.

Mitch returned to the apartment. "Did you leave a light on while you were gone?" he asked.

"No, of course not."

"Or the radio?"

"I disconnected it. Because of the mice. Somebody told me once that you should never leave anything plugged in when you go away, because mice can gnaw the wires and make a short circuit."

"Yeah," Mitch said. Things were getting real screwed up, and he began to think that maybe Pamela was telling the truth.

"Let's go over what happened," Mitch said. "Show me where this guy was sitting, and then I want you to walk in and do exactly what you did and tell me exactly what you said when you got back here from Europe."

She went through the motions without hesitating. It seemed that when she'd walked into the apartment the shades were down on account of the heat and she couldn't see too good. She expected to find Aunt Bessie, and Pamela didn't catch on that anything was wrong until she was in the middle of the room and saw this flabby guy sitting there wearing a red sports shirt with purple sleeves. She gasped and asked him who he was, and he said he was a friend of Aunt Bessie's, that Aunt Bessie was in the bedroom. Only Pamela knew that Aunt Bessie would never have a man around, and certainly not a guy like him.

Pamela said she turned and tried to leave, but the flabby guy got up and shoved her back, and then she ran into the bedroom and picked up the phone to call the police. Only she never got the chance, because the flabby guy ordered her to put the phone down. She swung around and he was standing there in the doorway and he had a gun aimed at her. She screamed, and then he fired at her and she passed out.

That part of it was kind of hard to take. "If the guy fired at you and missed," Mitch said, "then the bullet's got to be around here somewhere. And there's no sign of it in the walls."

"It could have hit the telephone book," Pamela said, pointing to the shelf where she kept it.

Mitch went over and picked up the book and flipped the pages. No slug had gone

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through them, but he noticed some red lines inside and he showed them to Pamela.

"I have a habit of marking the names of people I call," she said. "That makes it easier to find their numbers. Like my brother's, for instance." She turned the pages to the D's. There was a red line under the name of Robert Dover. "Actually," she said, "he's my half brother. He's an actor, you may have seen him on TV."

"Yeah," Mitch said, never having heard of the guy. "Now the way it looks is, somebody was here in your apartment while you were away, and it probably wasn't your aunt. Any idea how somebody could get in? What did you do with the key?"

"I left it under the mat, for Aunt Bessie."

"No kidding!" Mitch said. He was kind of shocked that a girl as smart as Pamela didn't know any better, but he explained quietly. "That's the first place a crook will look," he said. "You leave the key under the mat, and you're just asking for trouble."

"I didn't know—"

"Sure, that's okay. Now this brother of yours—he knew you were going away, didn't he?"

"Yes, of course."

"And the travel agent did, too. Who booked you?"

"Leonard Front, at Table Tours. But he wouldn't break into the apartment, he's much too nice."

"This aunt of yours," Mitch said. "You said she was pretty well off. Who gets her money when she dies?"

"Robert and I divide it," Pamela said. "We're her only relatives."

"And this flabby man—can you describe him a little better?"

"I'm afraid not. What I noticed mostly was that funny-looking shirt he was wearing. And the way he looked when I thought he was going to kill me—ugh!"

"Yeah," Mitch said.

He could pretty much smell out the case now. Three people—Pamela, Gus who was going to marry her, and Robert—they were the ones who'd get Bessie Bell's dough, so one or more of those three had a motive for killing her. And if she had been killed for her dough, then it seemed like Pamela had to be in on the thing, on account she was the one who'd told the story. So the next thing was to try and find out from the neighbors if they knew who'd been living in the Dover apartment while Pamela was away.

Mitch drew a big fat zero. The tenants underneath were

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deaf, they'd heard nothing; the people across the hall were away for the summer; and nobody in the building including the super had any information that would help. Three strikes and out.

Mitch got the address of Pam's half brother, this Robert Dover, and went over to see him. He had a one-room apartment in the Exeter Towers, up on the fourteenth floor, and it looked pretty much the way you'd expect a bachelor who was a TV actor to fix up his place. Robert himself was a dark good-looking guy with a nice pair of shoulders.

After Mitch identified himself, Robert came right out with it. "I guess you've been talking to Pam," he said. "Strangest story I ever heard. She told me about it over the phone and I advised her to call the police. Found out anything?"

"What do you make of the story?" Mitch asked.

Robert frowned. "Frankly," he said, "I just don't know. I only half believe it, because Pam has quite an imagination. When we were kids she was always making things up. There was no limit to what she'd pretend. You'd have thought she'd have gone into acting, instead of me."

"Why would she make this up?" Mitch asked.

Robert shrugged. "How would I know?"

"Seen your Aunt Bessie?" Mitch asked.

"No. I was away when she got here. In case you want to check up, and I suppose you should, I took my vacation from June twenty-ninth to July eighth. Aunt Bessie got here on the second of July, or at least she was supposed to."

"Did you call her when you got back?"

"I phoned her, but there was no answer."

"If she's dead you get half her dough."

"I'm aware of that."

"Where did you go on that vacation of yours?"

"Lake Hallock."

Mitch knew the place. It was a couple of hundred miles north, and if Robert had been there on July 2nd, when Bessie Bell arrived, then it looked like he was clean. So Mitch said, "Where did you stay? And with whom?"

Robert gave the address. He'd been up there with a girl friend, and Mitch took down her name, too. And later on, back at headquarters, Mitch spoke to her and to the Lake Hallock police. Robert Dover had been up there all right; he'd been with this girl of his and he hadn't left the place the entire time.

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Mitch figured he was covering the case pretty good, and he told the Lieutenant what he'd found out. The Lieutenant didn't have much new in the way of ideas, except he figured that the only angle that was going to get them anywheres was Bessie Bell.

"Better bring Gus in here," Decker said. "While I talk to him you can look around his garage for a likely place to hide a body. Buried or otherwise."

Gus didn't exactly cotton to the idea of leaving his place in the middle of the day. He said he had work to do and the police could come out here, couldn't they? They didn't have any cars they'd promised to fix up by five this evening. And what right did they have to boss Gus around? He was here in his garage, and he was staying here.

Mitch merely said that Pam was at headquarters and that the Lieutenant wanted Gus to back up a couple of things she'd said. Otherwise, after that story of hers—

Mitch didn't have to finish. You mentioned Pamela's name to Gus, and he came out fighting mad, and on her side. Mitch merely pointed out that the fight was due to take place down at headquarters, so Gus went in a hurry. While Mitch stayed in the garage.

He made friends with Gus's helper and pretended to give with some confidential information, which made it okay for Mitch to snoop around. But the thing was, where were you supposed to find a body in a garage, assuming that there was a body to find? The question stymied him, so he went into the side room that Gus called his office and Mitch sat down at the desk and phoned Amy.

"I been thinking about Joey," Mitch said. "Motivating him—you're right about that, only how do you do it?"

"If he remembered his subjects the way he remembers those baseball statistics," Amy said, "he'd get a hundred in everything."

"We got to make it a kind of game for him," Mitch said. Amy agreed, and that was as far as they got. Furthermore, Mitch didn't find any body, and the Lieutenant didn't get anywheres with Gus.

The next day Mitch started out to see this travel agent, name of Front. Mitch had a hunch that Front could break the case wide-open. Mitch didn't have any particular reason for the hunch. But after you've been investigating for as many years as Mitch had, you get a kind of feeling for where you ought to go and whom you ought to question, and sometimes you're right.

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Anyhow, Mitch had this feeling about Front, and on the way to the tourist office Mitch decided to stop off at Pamela Dover's apartment. Again, no special reason for it. He just sort of thought he ought to drop in there.

He parked double in front of the main entrance, and when he went into the lobby there was this guy polishing up the brass of the mail boxes. He was a little guy with big forearms and a big head, and it seemed he worked for the super when the super was away, like now. It was a long time since Mitch had seen anybody polishing up the brass in a building like this—nobody did that kind of work any more; so Mitch stopped and got to talking with the little guy.

It was just one of those things. Mitch said who he was and he told about how he was working on the Dover case and he asked the little guy what he knew about somebody living here while the Dover dame was in Europe. The little guy said he didn't know anything about that, but along about ten days ago a couple of truck drivers had gone up there and taken out a trunk. A green trunk. Yeah, pretty fair-sized. What trucking company? What kind of a truck? What did the men look like? The little guy didn't know any more. All he could say was, two men had taken out this trunk.

With that piece of information under his hat Mitch went upstairs to see Pam and find out if she had a green trunk. Only she wasn't in, so Mitch decided to skip this Front guy and go back to headquarters instead. There he told Decker about the trunk.

"Brother!" the Lieutenant said. "That's it—the body!"

Mitch didn't argue, but he figured the Lieutenant was going off half cocked, on account Bessie Bell had disappeared on July 2nd and the trunk hadn't left the apartment until about the tenth or the twelfth. So how do you figure that?

Anyhow, Mitch sat down and spent the rest of the morning on the phone, calling express and general hauling companies to see who'd picked up that trunk. He drew one blank after another. In the afternoon he had to be in court—he was due to give some testimony on an assault case he'd handled a couple of months ago. With him away, Decker put Bankhart and Balenky and Perkins, all three of them, on the trunk angle.

Mitch hung around in court all afternoon, but the case dragged on and they didn't even

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get to him. The D.A. told him to be there in the morning, he'd put Mitch on first thing, it wouldn't take more than fifteen or twenty minutes. Mitch called headquarters, but there was nothing new on the Dover case, so he was free to go home.

Joey was in the house. It was the week he'd decided he was going to be a magician, another Houdini, so instead of playing ball outside, he was practising with his magic set. He had some kind of a magic flame and he burned a hole in the couch, only Amy didn't find that out until after Joey had gone to bed, which was pretty lucky for the kid.

Like usual these days, Mitch and Amy got to talking about him, and Mitch came up with the idea that if Joey was so interested in magic, maybe they could convince him that a magician had to have a trained memory and ought to know twice as much about everything as anybody else. And that included geography.

Amy latched onto the idea and said there must be some memory tricks, but it was too bad they didn't know a professional magician who could get Joey started. Mitch said yeah, maybe he could look one up. Maybe a theatrical agency. There must be some kind of an agency that handled magicians; they went around and performed at parties and Mitch would see what he could do about it.

He was in court next morning and like he'd suspected, he had to hang around a couple of hours instead of getting put on the stand right off, like the D.A. had promised. So while Mitch was waiting, he got hold of a classified directory and looked up magicians, which weren't listed, and then theatrical agents, and sure enough there was one. The address was in the same building as the Table travel agency, which was a break. Then Mitch was finally called to the stand, and it didn't take more than five minutes and he wasn't even cross-examined.

Around noon he headed out to see this Leonard Front. Naturally he wasn't in. He was having trouble about that tour that went broke, and he was making himself scarce. Anyhow, what with that theatrical agency being upstairs, Mitch went up and asked about magicians.

The guy there, he looked like he hadn't booked anything in the last month if not the last year; his suit was frayed and he had an old tie on with a couple of soup stains halfway down, and he said the magician business was pretty bad. At kid

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parties these days they turned on the TV and let it go at that. Still, there was one guy that could maybe help Mitch out. He called himself Dr. Memory, and he was pretty much down on his luck. Didn't even have a permanent address, but you could usually locate him at the Hunt Hotel. He slept there most of the time, and they took messages for him.

Mitch went over to the joint. It was a real fleabag, but they said Dr. Memory was there, in Room 107.

Mitch went up and knocked on the door, and this flabby guy, he was wearing a red sports shirt with purple sleeves, he opened up and asked Mitch what he wanted.

Here Mitch had stumbled onto the big break in the case, but he didn't bat an eye. "I got a kid that wants to learn some magic tricks," he said. "They told me maybe you'd teach him."

"I may, or I may not," Dr. Memory said, real nasty. "I teach only the talented."

"There's dough in this," Mitch said.

Dr. Memory tried to draw himself up tall, which he couldn't exactly do on account of that flabbiness. "I," he said, still nasty, "put talent before money."

"I guess you must have inherited a pile," Mitch said.

"I earned it," Dr. Memory said, real stiff.

"Sure. Up in the Dover apartment."

Dr. Memory opened his mouth wide, but he was too scared to talk, so Mitch took out his identification. "Better tell me about it," he said.

"I didn't do anything," Dr. Memory said. There was nothing nasty about him now. He just wanted out. "I was asked to look at a room and to memorize everything. Every detail. I was paid fifty bucks and promised a lot more, but I had to come back in three or four weeks. I'd have to remember every single detail, so that objects could be put back in place."

"And after a few days," Mitch said, "you went back there to see what was happening. The key was under the mat and the apartment was empty, so you moved in. Free rent."

"I didn't do anything wrong."

"You shot at Miss Dover, and that makes it felonious assault."

"I was only trying to scare her, that's all. The gun had blanks—a prop gun."

"And she fainted, and you gave her a strong hypo that put her to sleep. Then you fixed up the room the way it had been. I

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know all that. So—who hired you?"

That was when there was a knock on the door. Balenky's voice said, "Police. Open up."

Mitch went to the door and yanked it open, and Balenky and Bankhart standing there outside did a double-take.

"What the hell are you doing here?" Balenky said.

"Wrapping up the case," Mitch said. "What are you doing here?"

You couldn't put anything over on Balenky. He was a little guy with gold teeth and he had a cheap cigar in his mouth most of the time, and he saw right through you in a flash.

"You tell us, if you know," he said, grinning. "We got a warrant, and we got a confession. If you're really on top of it, tell us who."

Mitch knew when he was licked. "I hadn't exactly got around to that," he said, "but you can tell the boss I got here first, and leave the rest of it up to me. So—who?"

"We traced the trunk up to Lake Hallock," Balenky said, "and the police up there fished it out of the lake, and there she was. Bessie Bell. And it was a real slick trick, too."

Lake Hallock tied in Robert, which was kind of a surprise to Mitch. He'd expected it to be Gus. Still, you don't ever admit you're wrong, so Mitch nodded and said, "Yeah, Robert Dover. That's how I figured it."

"Right," Balenky said. "He had this Dr. Memory look over the apartment right after Pamela left and before Bessie Bell was supposed to get there. Bessie arrived on schedule, July second, while Robert was away. He killed her after he got back and shipped the body up to Lake Hallock. He used a fake name and then went there and got the trunk, which he dumped in the lake. The scheme was to restore Pamela's apartment exactly the way it had been, to make it look as if Bessie Bell never got there at all. The plan would have worked, too, and there would have been no evidence that she had ever used the apartment, only Pam came home a week early. I guess you know the rest of it."

Mitch nodded. So that was the case, and it would look as if Mitch had figured it out all by himself, which was okay with him. But what bugged Mitch was, what about Joey? With this Dr. Memory in jail, which was where he was going, who was going to motivate Joey? Because unless he learned his geography, and later on things like Latin and art appreciation, where was he going to get after he grew up?

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a NEW Rand story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Number 22 in the series about Rand, the Double-C man, head of the Department of Concealed Communications . . . a spy-and-counterspy adventure combining such piquant ingredients as jai alai betting in Madrid, a beautiful BEA stewardess, double agents and double dealing, screams and shots in the shadows of the night—and a rousing finish . . .

THE SPY AND THE RELUCTANT COURIER

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Grant Saffern took a step backward and raised the Webley revolver to eye level. He sighted carefully and squeezed off three rounds. In the distance, along a rail fence, three gleaming amber bottles shattered as the bullets hit.

"Fine weapon, the Webley," he told Rand. "The Americans' General Custer carried one at the Little Big Horn."

"That's hardly a recommendation," Rand observed, shifting position on the stone steps. They were in the rear of Saffern's country home, a quaint old place about twenty miles north of London. Rand had known Grant Saffern only a few months, but he was impressed by the young man's knowledge of and skill with guns.

"You didn't come out here on a Saturday morning to talk about firearms," Saffern said. "Are you still after me to join Concealed Communications?"

"I am," Rand admitted. "I need you, Grant."

The young man brushed a strand of brown hair from his eyes and raised the pistol again. "I keep telling you I'm not a spy."

"Neither are we. We're cryptographers."

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"Same thing. It's a great deal closer to spying than my work as a diplomatic courier." He shifted position slightly and fired at another of the amber bottles. "I understand you've been involved in a number of top-secret missions."

Rand shrugged. "I do some traveling. But I'd want you for the London office—the same sort of work your father and grandfather did."

"I'm not one to spend my days poring over obscure ciphers and frequency tables and invisible writing. I like the outdoors too much. I like travel. My father wasted his life away. Hell, Rand, I just wouldn't be good at it."

"I think you would be, Grant. There's evidence, based on history, that skill in cryptography may run in families. When John Wallis died in 1703, his grandson assumed his cryptanalytical duties most successfully, becoming the first Englishman to be paid a regular salary for cryptanalysis."

"Didn't he end up shooting himself?"

"That's hardly relevant to my point. An even more remarkable family followed Wallis and his grandson. Edward Willes—a surprisingly similar name—was an Oxford clergyman who was joined in the field by his three sons and three grandsons. They formed the Decyphering Branch of the Secret Office, the Eighteenth Century forerunner to my own Department of Concealed Communications. I think you too may have inherited a skill at deciphering, a skill you don't even realize you possess."

"Hogwash!" Saffern snorted, shattering another of the amber bottles. "Besides, isn't it all done with machines now?"

"Cipher machines certainly are growing in importance, but there's still a great deal of brain work involved."

"I think I'd rather stay where I am. But thanks anyway."

Rand sighed. "You won't reconsider?"

"Look, tomorrow morning I leave for Madrid on a courier mission. I'll be there two days, during the visit of the Adanza president, waiting to bring back transcripts of meetings. That'll mean two days relaxing in the sun with a little BEA stewardess I know—much more pleasant work, I assure you, than being chased down alleys by the Russians."

"It's hardly like that any more," Rand said. A sudden thought struck him. "But if you won't come over to Double-C, could you at least spare me a half hour of your time in Madrid?"

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"For what?"

"A simple matter, really. We suspect a fellow's been using a cipher based in part on the system of jai alai betting as practiced in Madrid. We need one of the betting slips to see how the numbers are listed."

"Sounds easy enough. I suppose I could do that much for you, Rand. But this is only a one-time favor. Agreed?"

"Agreed."

"Fine. Now let's go in for a drink."

Rand thought little about the mission in the days that followed. When Hastings summoned him on the intercom early Friday morning he was completely unprepared for the news he received. "Rand, the Foreign Office is on my neck. One of their couriers, a man named Grant Saffern, is missing in Madrid. They say he was on some sort of mission for you."

Rand sat down hard. "Missing? I only asked him to pick up a jai alai betting slip for me. His father and grandfather did work in the cryptanalysis field, and I'm trying to get him into Double-C."

"By sending him on a dangerous mission?"

"There was no danger whatsoever! I could have asked our Embassy there to pick up a betting slip, but I wanted to get Saffern involved, wanted to make him feel he was part of the organization."

"I have enough problems right now," Hastings said, gesturing in despair toward the papers on his desk. "I don't want another. I think you'd better run over to Madrid and find out what happened to him."

Rand didn't like it. "He's probably off with some girl on the French Riviera."

"That was my suggestion," Hastings said. "But the Foreign Office wouldn't buy it."

"Why not?"

"There were bloodstains in Saffern's hotel room."

Rand's only starting point was the British European Airways stewardess whom Grant Saffern had mentioned. There were only two girls who'd been in Madrid at the right time—Wendy Fitzpatrick and Bree Gardner. They'd worked together on the Sunday flight to Madrid and had remained there Monday and Tuesday, their scheduled days off. Neither girl was in London at the moment, but Wendy was due back in Madrid Friday evening, and they had another flight together Saturday noon. Rand decided to catch the afternoon plane to Madrid.

He took a room in an old

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hotel near the center of the city, where his visit might pass unnoticed. When Wendy Fitzpatrick landed at Madrid Airport that evening, Rand was there to greet her. She proved to be a smiling blonde-haired girl, everybody's dream of the perfect airline stewardess.

"Miss Fitzpatrick? My name is Rand. I want to ask you about Grant Saffern."

"What about him?" Her eyes looked Rand up and down.

"I believe you were with him here in Madrid earlier this week."

She hesitated a moment, then nodded. "Yes, I saw him."

"He's missing. I'm down from London to find out what happened."

Wendy Fitzpatrick studied him carefully. "Missing?"

Rand nodded. "They found bloodstains in his hotel room."

"Oh, my God!" She seemed genuinely shocked by the news.

"You're the only link we have to whatever happened. I want to know everything you and Saffern did on Monday and Tuesday."

"I need a drink," she decided.

"That can be arranged."

Moments later, over one of those tiny circular tables peculiar to cocktail lounges everywhere, she lit a cigarette and said, "That's better. You really know how to shock a girl."

"I thought stewardesses were unshockable."

She smiled. "I know. We're supposed to be swingers, with a different guy in every city—like sailors with a girl in every port."

"Something like that," he admitted, liking her. "Tell me about Monday night. Where did you and Saffern go?"

"To the jai alai matches. Would you believe that?"

"Yes."

"I never knew he was interested in it before."

"Could you take me there? Tonight?"

She glanced at her watch. "We could go for a time. They last till one in the morning."

"Just briefly, while I look it over."

"Very well."

The idea of spending the evening with a girl like Wendy Fitzpatrick was enough to make Rand feel young again, and he was pleasantly conscious of the eyes that followed their progress into the *fronton* where professional teams of Basques vied in the fast and exciting game.

The betting on the jai alai games was a complicated affair, and it was this fact which in the beginning had prompted Rand's interest. A small-time double

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agent named Delecorte, sometimes employed by the British but more often by the East Germans, had been reporting the movement of money from certain Far Eastern countries into numbered Swiss bank accounts. Delecorte, a seedy little man of undetermined nationality, had gone off the British payroll and started feeding the information to the Germans. It had been Rand's suggestion that rather than outbid the enemy, Double-C simply intercept and decipher Delecorte's messages to East Germany.

It had been easier said than done. Basil Delecorte was far from being a clever operator in the world of cryptography, but his contacts in Swiss banking circles had led him to an appreciation of the sport of jai alai, whose Basque teams often had financial backing among the Swiss. This in turn gave him the idea of using the intricate jai alai betting slips as the basis for his secret messages.

"Do you know much about the betting here?" he asked Wendy when they'd settled down to watch the preliminary action on the court below.

She tossed her mane of blonde hair and moved closer to him. Still wearing her bright miniskirted uniform, she was attracting admiring stares from the predominantly male audience. "I know it's the most popular form of gambling in Madrid," she said. "They actually go wild with their betting. Jai alai is played with two teams of two men each, but they start out with six players on the court in a sort of round robin to determine the lineup of each team. Bookmakers in the rear actually take bets on the lineups, and later on the game itself."

"I see."

She pointed down to the three-walled court where the half dozen Basques were in action. "That long curved wicker basket strapped to their wrists is a cesta. As you can see, they use it for both catching and throwing the ball against the front wall of the court."

"That ball looks hard."

"It is, and it travels with amazing speed. It could probably kill a person if it hit him just right."

"You say there's betting on the lineup of the teams?"

She nodded. "See? They sell numbered tickets for each of the possible combinations: 1-2, 1-3, 1-4, 1-5, 1-6, 2-1, 2-3, 2-4, and so on. With six players there are thirty possible team combinations, so thirty tickets are sold for betting."

"Isn't 1-2 the same as 2-1?"

"No, because the first

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number listed is the team captain, and that's important. The first two players to accumulate five points in this pre-game round robin are the team captains, and the next two are the team players."

"It seems unnecessarily complicated."

"But it gives many opportunities for betting, and that's its whole purpose. Bets are placed on the team lineup at the beginning and again after the captains are chosen. Then there are bets on the game itself, which may go on for hours."

Rand was studying the paper on which the thirty different team combinations were listed. Disregarding the dash between numbers, he had thirty two-digit numbers ranging from 12 to 65. Of course there were no doubles like 22 or 33, and no numbers containing a zero or a digit larger than six. All this agreed with the messages they'd intercepted from Basil Delecorte. With thirty numbers to translate into a simple substitution cipher, Delecorte could be using the alphabets of almost any European language. It was now only a matter of determining which language.

Then he remembered the main reason for his flight to Madrid. Grant Saffern was still missing, possibly murdered. Rand had to find out why. "Where did you go after the games?" he asked Wendy.

"We had a drink and then he dropped me at my hotel," she said, averting her eyes. "That was all."

"No love-making?"

"No."

"What about Tuesday?"

"We went sightseeing. The usual places—the Prado, the tapa bars . . . Did you ever try octopus with mayonnaise, Mr. Rand?"

"Never, and I hope I never will."

There was a roar from the crowd and a final red star went up on the scoreboard. The teams had been chosen. Spectators rose from their seats and hurried back to the bookmakers for a last round of betting. Rand steered the girl to a refreshment stand, scanning the crowd for a familiar face.

As Rand turned from the refreshment stand his eyes caught the face he was seeking. It was Basil Delecorte, as stout and seedy as ever, with a betting slip in his hand. "I'll meet you back at our seats," he told Wendy, and moved forward to intercept the little man.

"Well! Rand, isn't it?" Delecorte showed only the slightest surprise at seeing him. "Down from London on holiday?"

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"Something like that, Basil. How's the Swiss banking business these days?"

The little man glanced around quickly. "Not so loud! There are ears everywhere."

Rand turned serious. "I'm looking for Grant Saffern."

"Do I know him?"

"I think so, Basil. He was here Monday night with that girl I'm with. The stewardess."

Delecorte stared at Wendy over the tops of his glasses. "Never saw her before."

"But you did see Saffern?"

"Maybe, maybe not." He glanced around nervously. "Look, this is no place to talk. I'll come to your hotel later tonight."

Rand nodded. "I'm at the Paris. Room 524. Come around midnight."

The little man shook his head. "I'll be here till one. It'll be after that."

Rand nodded agreement. Wendy had returned to their seats, and when he rejoined her the match was already in progress. They watched for a time and then he suggested they leave.

Later, strolling in the Plaza Mayor near the great equestrian statue of King Felipe III, he asked, "When will you be leaving Madrid?"

"Bree Gardner and I have a flight out at noon tomorrow. Stewardesses never stay long in one place."

"I'm sorry you're going so soon. Perhaps we can meet some time in London."

She brushed the hair back from her eyes. "But it's early yet! Couldn't we go dancing?"

"I haven't danced in years."

"So what? Come on!" She took him by the hand and led him down another twisting side street, to a bar with a red neon bull over its door. They found a table in the corner, near a crowded dance floor.

"Is this where you came with Saffern?" he asked.

"Forget Saffern. Let's talk about us. Tell me about London."

"You must know more about it than I do."

"Not really. I know the swinging parts, but those aren't the real city. Are you with the foreign service, like Grant?"

"In a sense. But I thought we weren't talking about him."

She grinned impishly. "I think you're all spies!"

"Grant Saffern is a diplomatic courier. He must have told you that. The president of Adanza has been meeting with our ambassador here this week, about Britain's extending diplomatic recognition to his newly formed government. Grant was to carry the transcripts of the talks back to London."

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"And someone kidnaped him to get the documents?"

Rand had to chuckle. "Hardly. First of all, he never picked up the transcripts. And secondly, no one is really interested in the Adanzan government. It's a tiny country in the middle of the desert, with not even any oil to sell."

"Then what happened to him?"

"I wish I knew," Rand sighed. "How long have you known Saffern?"

"About six months. He was often on our flights."

"You and this other girl, Bree?"

She nodded. "The airline likes to team us together because she's a brunette."

Rand laughed. "I can remember when airlines worried about more important things than the color of their stewardesses' hair."

They danced a while, rather fumblingly, until Rand gave up and suggested they leave. "I'm a better walker than a dancer," he explained.

"You'll be better next time."

At her hotel he took her hand. "I enjoyed this evening."

"It's been a long time since a man reached for my hand at the end of an evening," she told him.

Rand grinned. "I'm not always such a gentleman on the second date. How about breakfast in the morning?"

"I really can't. I have this noon flight and I want to do a bit of shopping first."

He nodded. "Another time."

"I don't even know your first name."

"Sometimes I forget I have one."

He left her in the lobby and headed back through the twisting streets to his own hotel. It was after one and he hoped that Basil Delecorte had waited for him.

He'd been in his room only a few minutes when a light knock on the door signaled Delecorte's arrival. The short man was now wearing a dark sweater and jacket and looked a bit like a retired burglar.

"What about Saffern?" Rand asked, coming right to the point.

The little man shifted his feet. "I don't work for you any more, Rand. Is there any money in it for me?"

"Aren't the East Germans paying you enough?"

Delecorte sighed. "I always liked working for the British better than for the Germans. I suppose the British stopped paying me because Double-C was able to read my simple cipher messages to the East

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Germans without keeping me on the payroll."

"You give my department a great deal of credit."

"You deserve it. You're a good man, Rand."

"All right," Rand said with a chuckle. "I'll give you ten pounds."

"Twenty."

"Twenty, then. Where's Saffern?"

"My information on the Swiss bank accounts comes through someone named Reade. It's brought to me weekly by Reade, with no questions asked. Everything was fine until your friend Saffern became involved with Reade. When they saw him at the jai alai game Monday night they were afraid he knew about my cipher and some other things, so they kidnaped him from his hotel room."

"What other things?"

The little man shrugged. "Some of Reade's schemes."

"Saffern is still alive?"

A nod. "The word is he just got a scalp wound. That caused the blood."

"You say Saffern was involved with this Reade. Exactly how?"

Basil Delecorte shifted uneasily. "Well, I suppose you'd have to say he was sleeping with her."

"Reade is a *woman?*"

"Of course. She's the stewardess Saffern was romancing."

Rand felt a lump in his stomach. "You mean Wendy Fitzpatrick?"

"I only know her as Miss Reade. She has contacts in Bern, and she brings me the information on numbered accounts each week. We split the profits from my sale. As I said, no questions asked."

"Quite a coincidence that Saffern knew her," Rand said, thinking of the innocent mission he'd assigned to the missing courier.

"No coincidence at all. Reade probably sought him out. She has other irons in the fire besides my little deal."

"I imagine so," Rand agreed, remembering the tilt of her blonde head, the softness of her touch. "She must have tipped off the East Germans when he took her to the jai alai game and showed an interest in the betting slips."

Delecorte nodded.

"Where is Saffern now?" He tried not to think of Wendy. His job was to get Grant Saffern back, alive.

"An apartment overlooking the junk stalls of the Rastro. That's as much as I know. They plan to hold him another day or two, then either release him or kill him."

"Why the uncertainty?"

"Killing a British official,

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even a minor one, can be troublesome. If their scheme works without it, he may be allowed to live."

"What scheme is that?"

Delecorte shrugged. "You would have to ask Reade."

"Forget about Reade, or whatever her name is," Rand snapped. "Can you take me to the Rastro?"

"At this time of night?"

"Right now."

"It would cost you more. Another twenty pounds."

Rand passed over the money and watched the bills disappear into the little man's inner pocket. "Let's go."

"Do you have a gun? You may need one."

Rand felt the unfamiliar bulge of the little automatic beneath his arm. He didn't like weapons, but sometimes they were necessary.

As they went down to the lobby he was hoping Wendy Fitzpatrick would not be waiting at the apartment overlooking the Rastro.

The place by day was a narrow maze of junk stalls where one might purchase anything from a seven-foot bronze candlestick to a used Chevrolet carburetor. By night, without its crowds of bargain hunters, it was a strange place of flickering shadows cast by the canvas stall-tops rippling in the breeze. Rand looked up at the nearby buildings with their antique balconies and wondered how he would ever go about finding Grant Saffern in a place like this.

"This is as far as I bring you," Delecorte said. "It is too dangerous for me."

"Very well."

"Look, Rand, we will talk about the Swiss bank reports. Maybe I can start working for the British again."

"All right," Rand said, tasting the final irony. Grant Saffern's mission had not even been necessary. None of it had been necessary. Delecorte was ready to come back.

"Goodbye now."

He moved quickly away, and Rand watched his shadow mingle with the others until it disappeared. Then, without warning, there was a cry of terror. "*Rand!*"

Delecorte stumbled back into view, struggling with a tall mustached Spaniard. Rand saw the man's knife and reached for his gun. He fired two quick shots, as close as he could without hitting Delecorte. The assailant twisted free and vanished into the shadows, leaving Basil Delecorte to slump sideways against one of the empty stalls.

"Who was it?" Rand asked.

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He could see the blood now, where the man's knife had caught Delecorte in the side.

Delecorte took a hand away from his side and studied the bloody palm. He didn't seem to quite believe what he saw. "Man named Tapiz, one of Reade's friends. He saw me bring you here. God, Rand, I'm dying!"

"Here, sit down. We'll try to do something about that wound. My shots should bring help soon."

"In the Rastro, at three in the morning? No, friend Rand. We are alone here."

"All right. I'll go for somebody."

Delecorte slipped slowly down until he was sitting on the dirty pavement. The blood was flowing, and Rand knew it was hopeless. "Save your friend," the little man said. "They might kill him now. It's too late for me."

"Which apartment, Basil?" Rand asked, but it was too late. Delecorte slumped over on his side and Rand knew he was dead.

Rand remained on his knees for a moment, reluctant to leave the dead man. He knew Tapiz must still be close at hand, and he had no idea which way to go. Then something from above caught his eye. It was a flickering light in one of the apartments, a small table lamp reflecting off the ceiling. On, off, on off—almost in a pattern of some sort. Not Morse Code, but a number sequence.

Rand cleared his head and tried to think. Even as he watched, the light went out. He was about to forget it and move on when it started flickering again. This time he was ready for it. Four pause three pause one pause two pause—

He quickly jotted down the sequence of numbers. When the light went out again, he looked at what he had: 43123515. No zeroes, nothing over six. It was Delecorte's jai alai cipher, and only one person on earth could be using it—Grant Saffern.

He was sending a straight alphabet in English, with 1-2 standing for A, 1-3 for B, and so on. 4-3, 1-2, 3-5, 1-5 spelled R-A-N-D. That was all the message had to say.

Rand found the back entrance to the building and went up the stairs quietly, two at a time. A step halfway up squeaked, but no one appeared. If Tapiz was hunting him, he wasn't in here. At the top Rand paused to listen, but there was no sound. He located the door he thought was right, and knocked softly. After a moment it opened and a voice

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from the darkness spoke through a thin crack. "Who is it?"

"Tapiz," Rand whispered, taking a chance. "I killed that dog Delecorte, but the Englishman ran away."

The man behind the door hesitated, perhaps sensing that something was wrong. Rand hit the wood with his shoulder, knocking the man off balance, and charged into the apartment. From across the room there was the bark of a pistol. He threw himself to one side, feeling the tug of a bullet on his sleeve, and fired once. There was a grunt and the man across the room went down. Rand rolled over, expecting an attack from the man at the door, but he was crouched against the wall, mumbling a prayer in Spanish.

Getting quickly to his feet, Rand picked up the wounded man's fallen gun and switched on a light. He motioned both men into a corner and backed to the door in the opposite wall. Grant Saffern was alone in the next room, bound and gagged on a rumpled bed. His fingers had managed to reach the socket plug for a table lamp and send the flickering message.

"You all right?" Rand asked, pulling off the adhesive gag.

"Just barely, old chap. They've been shooting me full of tranquilizers for three days. I heard someone shout your name down there, and then the shots, so I took a chance."

Rand kept an eye on the two men in the other room as he untied Saffern. "I got you into it. The least I could do was get you out. What happened?"

"Damn girl I was dating turned out to be a secret agent."

"I know about that. Code name Reade."

"You've been busy."

"But all this wasn't for the jai alai cipher."

"No, it's something bigger. She's taking the noon flight to Rome tomorrow."

Rand nodded. "Keep these two covered while I get some police down here. Then I've got to see about a ticket to Rome."

Wendy Fitzpatrick and a dark-haired stewardess were standing together at the end of the covered ramp, welcoming passengers aboard the big jet liner to Rome. Rand passed through the standard metal detection device, thankful the gun was in his suitcase with the other luggage, and greeted Wendy with a forced smile.

"Some unexpected business in Rome," he murmured.

"How nice to have you aboard," she said, covering her surprise. "This is my friend, Bree Gardner."

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The brunette smiled sweetly. "I've been hearing about you."

"All good, I hope." Rand passed them and entered the big plane, making his way down the aisle to a seat in the first-class section.

Almost immediately he was followed aboard by a bearded, deeply tanned man in an unfamiliar military uniform, accompanied by an aide. When Wendy passed through on her way to the galley, Rand caught her eye. "Who's the bearded gentleman in the uniform?"

"The president of Adanza. He's flying home by way of Rome."

Rand nodded slowly as the final piece of the puzzle dropped into place. He started to rise from his seat, then froze. Another passenger had entered the cabin. It was Tapiz, the mustached Spaniard who had murdered Basil Delecorte.

Tapiz took a seat a few rows ahead of Rand, showing no sign of recognition. After a few more passengers had boarded, the forward door was closed and the big jet engines shuddered into life. The plane began to move.

Once they were in the air, Rand left his seat and moved back to the rear of the plane. He passed Bree Gardner on the way and exchanged smiles with her, watching while she offered a pillow to Tapiz and another passenger. Then he continued to the rear of the plane where he found Wendy alone in the galley.

"Passengers aren't allowed here, Mr. Rand," she said sweetly.

"Why did you lie to me, Wendy?"

She turned, startled, to face him. "So you found out!"

"Damn right I found out!" His fist came up fast, traveling a few inches to connect with the tip of her jaw. Her head snapped back and he caught her as she started to fall. "Sorry," he whispered, but she couldn't hear him. He lowered her gently to the floor of the galley as the call button sounded from one of the passenger seats. He glanced down the aisle, already knowing it would be Tapiz.

Rand waited. The bell sounded again, and Tapiz rose halfway from his seat, peering toward the back of the plane in search of Wendy. When she didn't appear, he turned forward. The other stewardess, Bree Gardner, was moving down the aisle taking drink orders. Tapiz hesitated only an instant. Then he moved out of his seat, grabbed Bree, and pulled a revolver from his belt. Rand moved forward down the aisle.

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"A little detour," the Spaniard announced, pointing his gun at Bree's head as he held her by the shoulder. "This plane is going to North Africa. The president of Adanza will be taken off there, and the rest of you may then continue your journey." As he spoke he turned toward the front of the plane, twisting Bree with him. The man in the military uniform had risen from his seat. Tapiz said sharply, "If you try anything, the girl dies. Then you die, Mr. President. Sit down!"

Rand continued down the aisle toward Tapiz as a woman in the rear screamed in fright. Tapiz turned, saw Rand, and pressed the revolver against Bree's temple. "Sit down, Englishman! Down, or the girl dies!"

Rand kept coming. "Go ahead and shoot her."

A male passenger tried to grab Rand and stop him, but he shook off the clutching hand. He was only five feet from Tapiz and the girl. "I warn you—another step and she dies!"

Rand lunged forward. The gun came away from the stewardess's temple and was leveled at him; but before Tapiz could squeeze the trigger, Rand had his hands on the weapon, twisting it toward the roof of the plane. He pushed Bree out of the way, into a passenger's lap, and floored Tapiz with a quick judo chop to the throat. The Spaniard went down so hard that he released his grip on the gun.

"Tell the pilot we're going back to Madrid," Rand shouted. He stepped over Tapiz's fallen body, moving toward the revolver in the aisle. Bree Gardner saw him and was on her feet, diving for the weapon herself. Rand tackled her between the seats, landing on top of her, and reached the gun first.

"You won't be needing this, Miss Gardner," he said. "Or should I call you Miss Reade?"

Grant Saffern was waiting at the Madrid airport, looking worried. "What in hell happened? Why did you take that flight alone, Rand?"

"Because I didn't know exactly what her plan was. It wasn't till I was aboard and saw Tapiz and the president of Adanza that I figured it would be a plane hijacking. Some people back in Adanza had reasons for wanting their new president out of the way, and they offered a big price to have him kidnaped and detained in a North African country. Tapiz and Miss Reade decided to do the job. It was more profitable

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than running bank statements from Bern and selling them to Basil Delecorte. She had sneaked the revolver on board, past the metal detectors, and had given it to Tapiz in the pillow she brought him."

"I never suspected her of anything until that night at the jai alai games."

"That was my fault, getting you involved," Rand admitted. "Of course Bree Gardner had arranged to meet you sometime in the past, possibly when she learned that your courier activities might tie in with the Adanza state visit. But when you showed interest in the jai alai cipher, she was afraid you were onto her activities with Delecorte."

"I was even foolish enough to mention the cipher to her," Saffern groaned. "Next thing I knew she had Tapiz and a couple of other hoods slug me in my hotel room."

Wendy Fitzpatrick appeared at that moment, moving her jaw painfully. "What was *that* all about?" she demanded. "Did you hit me just because I lied about being Grant's girl?"

"That would have been a good reason," Rand admitted. "You had me thinking you were the spy."

"I didn't really lie at first," she reminded him. "You sort of jumped to the conclusion that I was Grant's girl, after I admitted knowing him. Of course I'd met him with Bree and I knew they'd gone to the jai alai game Monday evening. I was free last night, and you were a handsome older man, Mr. Rand. It seemed like fun to deceive you about Grant. I didn't think I'd end up getting socked in the jaw!"

"There was no time to explain back in the plane. Tapiz would have grabbed you as his hostage, and I had to knock you out for your own safety. Without you he was forced to use Bree, and I was sure he wouldn't shoot her."

Grant Saffern was merely shaking his head. "But you knew it was Bree and not Wendy even before I told you. How?"

"At the jai alai game, Delecorte couldn't identify Wendy though he'd certainly have known her if she was his partner in the Swiss bank business. But the main thing was the name. Our gal was using the code name of Reade, and she had obviously chosen it by taking every other letter in her own name, Bree Gardner."

"I guess I lost a girl friend," Saffern said glumly.

"Why don't we talk about it over drinks," Rand suggested. "I owe Wendy something for that sock on the jaw."

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"Fine," the blonde girl agreed. "They're sending another crew on the Rome flight, so I'm off till tomorrow."

Rand smiled at Grant Saffern. "I saved your hide and found you a new girl—all in one day. Is that enough to interest you in Double-C?"

"It has been exciting," Saffern said. "But that's enough excitement to last me a lifetime. You can keep your codes and spies, Rand. I'll stick to shooting at bottles on weekends—and to Wendy."

"Q"

INDEX TO VOLUME FIFTY-NINE — JANUARY-JUNE 1972

(Continued from page 160)

MARRIC, J. J.: Gideon and the Chestnut Vendor ... Feb. 20
Gideon and the Vintage Car Thefts ... May 6
MATHER, BERKELY: No Questions Asked ... April 21
MATHESON, RICHARD: Leo Rising ... May 112
MATHIESON, THEODORE: No Motive ... June 81
MAUGHAM, ROBIN: Follow the Sun ... March 79
MAYBERRY, FLORENCE V.: Screen Test ... Feb. 6
MCGERR, PATRICIA: The Last Check ... March 83
MCLAUCHLIN, RUSSELL: Teatime in Baker Street ... Feb. 92
MORSE, JOHN D.: Detectiverse (Middle-Aged Fan's Lament) ... Jan. 105
Detectiverse (Dear Ngaio Marsh) ... May 86
NEVINS, JR., FRANCIS M.: Open Letter to Survivors ... May 72
PARKER, PERCY SPURLARK: Block Party ... April 84
PEIRCE, J. F.: Nothing New Under the Sun ... June 40
PIERCE, JOHN: Once a Cop ... Jan. 48
Abracadabra ... April 56
PORTER, JOYCE: Dover and the Dark Lady ... May 41
POWELL, JAMES: Trophy Day at the Chateau Gai ... Feb. 35
RICHTER, JOAN: Last Harvest ... Jan. 39
ROBERTS, E. E.: A Little Ride in the Car ... Feb. 119
ROSS, IRWIN: One Chance in 100,000,000 ... Feb. 64
SIMENON, GEORGES: Inspector Maigret and the Missing Miniatures ... March 47
SINCLAIR, ROBERT B.: All According to Plan ... May 119
SPEED, JANE: The Events Between ... June 84
"Who-dun-it" (verse) ... June 98
STEVENS, R. L.: Just Something That Happened Lot 721/XY258 ... Feb. 58
May 114
TREAT, LAWRENCE: Wife Trouble ... March 42
B As in Bandit ... April 137
M As in Missing ... June 99
TYRE, NEDRA: The Stranger Who Came Knocking ... June 20
VAN NESS, LIKA: Mr. Anonymous ... Jan. 98
WELLEN, EDWARD: The Assassin ... June 71
WOOLRICH, CORNELL: Only One Grain More ... April 93
YOUNG, ALAN K.: Child's Play ... Jan. 106
Ponsonby and the Ransom Note ... June 72

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DR. COFFEE AND THE PARDELL CASE

by LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN

The evening was almost balmy. There was a smell of spring in the air, and Max Ritter went to work reluctantly. Why is it, he mused as his long legs carried him through the detectives' squad room toward his own office, that the scent of spring never successfully invaded a police station? The police-station smell was universal, unaffected by geography, the seasons, or the time of day. The ghost of dead tobacco smoke, the aura of unemptied cuspidors, the locker-room effluvia of socks and old sweat shirts always dominated the more subtle aromas of printer's ink from the Identification Bureau and the musty odor of old paper from the files.

The lanky sad-eyed detective whom one police reporter called "the unflappable cop with the flappable ears" kicked

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the door shut behind him and switched on his desk light. He had just sat down to study the day's squawk sheet when his phone rang.

"Homicide," he said. "Lieutenant Ritter."

A curious cacophony of gasps, grunts, and gurgles vibrated in the receiver.

"Hello." Ritter's thumb rattled the contact bar. "Hello!"

"Max!" A gasp. "Max, I'm in trouble. This is Pete."

"Pete who?" the detective demanded, although the voice was unhappily familiar.

"You—you remember Pete Pardell, Max? You said so—just yesterday. Max, help! Help me!"

"What's up, Pete? Yesterday you laughed at me when—"

"I was wrong, Max. He's going to kill me. He's been following me. I—I just got home in time. I locked myself in but he—he can break down the door. He's banging on it now . . . Max . . ."

A groan. Then silence.

"Hello. Hello, Pete!" Ritter thought he heard labored breathing at the other end of the line. Still holding the receiver to his ear he buzzed Communications Center on the interphone.

"Joe, this is Ritter. Squad car to Indian Hill, the old Inglewood place. Fella name of Pardell just called for help, then lost his voice. Signal 10-16, possible 10-10."

The intercom box growled back at Ritter. He snapped it silent. He stood up, wondering if he should wait for a report from the squad car or take a run up to Indian Hill himself. On the possibility that Pete Pardell might be sober and his supposed danger real, the detective buzzed for transportation.

That someone should want to kill Pardell, Ritter reflected as his car headed for Indian Hill, was no great surprise. He had gone to Northbank High School with Pardell and had decided even then that if the big bully had ever possessed the milk of human kindness, it had long since turned to clabber. Stealing luncheon money from smaller boys had been one of Pardell's less vicious tricks.

To be "the local boy who made good" had not only been Peter Pardell's early ambition, it had been a career which he had pursued with pitiless determination. His mother was a cleaning woman at the Barzac Soup Cannery. His father, after several false starts, had disappeared for good when Peter was six. Born to poverty, Peter took a childhood oath that he himself would never grow up to be poor.

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Peter did not carry newspapers or mow lawns after school to help out at home. He played basketball. Before he had finished high school his mother had worked herself into a state of exhaustion, pulmonary tuberculosis, and the County Hospital. As a minor Peter should have been made a ward of the state, but he would not accept charity—at least, not public charity. He was an arrogant squirt whose greatest pleasure was to cross the street in a leisurely manner against the lights, particularly when the stream of traffic was choked with Cadillacs and Lincolns, and thumb his nose at the screech of brakes.

He had taken a room with a retired bus driver who needed the rental to supplement his meager pension and the wages his pretty daughter Erica earned as a waitress. It was doubtful, however, if Peter had paid any rent at all in view of the tender relationship that developed between him and Erica. It was generally understood, certainly by Erica, that young Pardell would marry Erica when he finished high school. Instead he left Northbank without warning or forwarding address, supposedly for some Eastern college on an athletic scholarship.

Not long afterward Erica Enfield died of septic abortion.

Max Ritter had lost sight of Peter Pardell for several years until his name popped up in the newspapers in connection with a basketball scandal. Ritter had thought that gamblers were probably sending Pardell through law school, until he read that Pardell had testified against Otto "Odds-on" Gluck, the gambler who was supposed to have bribed him. Gluck, the papers reported, had tried to hand Pardell five grand to throw the game against Villanova, but Pardell had refused the bribe and scored an impossible basket in overtime to beat Villanova. Pardell had fallen into the proverbial outhouse and come up with both arms full of roses; but Odds-on Gluck had gone to jail.

There had been another blackout of Pardell news until, out of a blue sky, he had made a triumphal return to Northbank. He rode into his home town in a block-long Lincoln Continental, the status symbol he had once treated with a delighted sneer, complete with uniformed chauffeur, a befurred and bejeweled wife beside him with a snooty white miniature poodle in her lap. He was a junior partner in a high-powered New York law firm, a position he had achieved by marrying the daughter of the

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senior-senior partner.

He had come back to Northbank to defend a suit brought by an employee of the Barzac Canneries and the International Canning Machines Corporation for infringement of patent. The plaintiff, Stuart Blount, was suing for $1,000,000 in damages and back royalties on an invention which he claimed simplified the operation of sealing cans and which he said had been stolen from him without adequate compensation. Peter Pardell convinced the jury that Blount had perfected his gadget on company time while employed by Barzac, and that therefore the invention rightfully belonged to Barzac and that the $1000 bonus and $5 weekly raise received that year was ample, if not generous, compensation.

When the verdict was announced, Blount went home and ate a dozen sleeping pills. However, he was found in a coma and his stomach pumped out so that he could go back to his $95-a-week job at the cannery.

After his court victory Pardell had gone back to New York, but the taste of his new power status in the town where he had previously been merely a cleaning woman's impecunious son was too sweet not to be savored more often. He bought a house on Indian Hill where Northbank's millionaires used to build their gingerbread castles during the reign of Roosevelt I. He could have bought a modern place with air conditioning and pastel-tinted plumbing for half the price, but he had to have Indian Hill, the Olympus of those who had once looked down on an inferior Peter Pardell.

The Pardells came home only for an occasional weekend and for the month that the Metropolitan Opera and the New York Philharmonic visited Northbank—events which gave Peter a chance to display his beautiful wife, round-shouldered from the weight of her jewels. He kept the house open all year, however, employing as caretaker a man named Henry Inglewood, the former owner, an elderly gentleman who had lost his money, his self-confidence, and his friends about the time Peter's star was rising. Henry Inglewood may not have been a charter member, but he was certainly a high-ranking constituent of the Plague on Peter Pardell League.

In Lieutenant Ritter's book the leading candidate for president of the League would be Otto "Odds-on" Gluck, once he was at liberty. And it was a routine circular Ritter had seen

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just a few days before, announcing that the gambler had been released from prison, that had caused Ritter to make contact with Pardell for the first time since their high-school days. It was not a gesture of friendship on the detective's part. He merely thought it was as much the business of the Homicide Squad to forestall a homicide as to bring the perpetrator to justice afterward. So, learning that the Pardells were in town, he had driven to Indian Hill to offer protection.

"Otto Gluck got out of pokey last week," said Ritter. "Does he know where you are?"

"How should I know and why should I care?" countered the local boy who had made good.

"Your testimony got him five years," said Ritter. "Maybe he's got a good memory. Maybe he thinks he owes you something. I can give you a twenty-four-hour guardian angel if you think your ex-pal is in Northbank."

"Thank you, but no," Pardell had said with a pitying smile. "There are plenty of the local yokels who might be gunning for me, without looking for outside trouble. But frankly, Max, they're more afraid of me than I am of them."

But now, suddenly, the fearless Pardell had been introduced to fear . . .

As Ritter's car approached the wrought-iron grille that marked the entrance to Indian Hill, three police cars were already parked in the graveled circular driveway. Flashlights were flickering in the shrubbery like fireflies in August.

A plainclothesman emerged from the glass-enclosed veranda which had been added to the shingled facade like an afterthought.

"What are you doing here, Jenkins?" the lieutenant asked.

"I caught the signal on my car radio on the way home," Jenkins answered, "so I sort of dropped in. It's a funny business, kind of."

"What's so funny?"

"Well, the joint's deserted."

"Can't be," said Ritter. "Pardell just phoned me."

"I been through every room in this mausoleum," Jenkins said, "except one, and that's locked. Nobody around but the butler and he's squiffed."

"Where's all the other flunkeys?"

"It's Thursday—everybody's night off except the butler, and he's got himself stinko because the Pardells eat out on Thursdays and it's dinner time. He's paralyzed in the basement."

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"How'd you get in then?"

"The caretaker. He's got keys to everything except the locked room. He lives in that little cottage down by the gate. Name's Inglewood, he says."

"Let's go in," Ritter said. "What's that window with the light on?"

"That's the room we can't get into. You can't see anybody through the window, but we been banging on the door."

"Break it down, Brody," Ritter ordered the detective sergeant accompanying him.

Peter Pardell lay on the floor behind an expensive marquetry desk. He was partly doubled up, as though in pain. The superior half sneer that had served him so well in the courts of law as well as on the basketball court had gone at last from his gray waxen features. His eyes were wide-open in glassy terror. A telephone lay beside him on the Kirman-Lavehr rug, the receiver still clasped in his hand.

Ritter had seen enough corpses in his career with Homicide to recognize one on sight, but he pressed his ear against Pardell's chest anyhow to listen for a possible heartbeat. There was none.

"Brody, try the windows."

"I already tried 'em from the outside. They're all locked."

"Is that a working fireplace?"

Brody got down on his hands and knees in front of the ornate marble mantle, aimed his flashlight up the chimney, and twisted his neck. "Flue's closed," he announced.

"Is there another phone in the house?" Ritter asked.

"In that little room just across the hall. Want me to call the coroner?"

"I'll handle the coroner. You get back to the car radio and call the technical crew up here."

Ritter spent another few minutes making a cursory examination of the late Peter Pardell's mortal remains and their immediate surroundings. Then he crossed the hallway to what was evidently Mrs. Pardell's reception room, judging from the feminine frills, rococo trimmings, multiple mirrors on the walls, and pale velvety rugs on the floor. He sat down at a desk with spindly gilt bowlegs and picked up the telephone.

Instead of calling the coroner, however, he dialed the home number of Daniel Webster Coffee, M.D. Dr. Coffee served as Ritter's private medical examiner. The coroner's knowledge of forensic medicine was limited to little more than banging a gavel to preside over the antiquated coroner's inquest, still Northbank County's legal method of determining the

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cause of sudden or unexplained death. The coroner was always quite happy to accept Dr. Coffee's intervention as long as the pathologist let him take credit for autopsy findings.

"Hi, Doc," said Ritter into the phone. "I hope you ain't settled in for the night, because I got a dandy little job for you. You might call it one of those classic locked-room puzzles you talk about, only I happen to know the corpse. . .Well, not a friend exactly, even if I did go to school with him once. You want to take a gander at the stiff before the coroner gets his clumsy mitts on it? He's still warm. He called me half an hour ago. Somebody's after him, he said . . .

"How do I know it's homicide? . . . Well, matter of fact, I don't. There's no blood around, so he isn't stabbed. I don't see no bullet holes. His phiz ain't purple, like if he was strangled . . . Whadya mean, maybe he was scared to death? . . . How can I tell about cardiac arrest? That's why I say, maybe you should come over . . . So you'll do a P.M. in the A.M.? Okay, I'll have him shipped over to Pasteur Hospital after the coroner gets here and releases the body. I'll be around after the coffee break."

Dr. Coffee broke in to say, "Not too early, Max. Tomorrow's a busy day in surgery and I'll have at least two frozen sections. Why don't we meet for lunch at Raoul's?"

"Okay."

"I'll phone Raoul. Say about one o'clock. That'll give you time to muster your suspects."

"Suspects? Doc, I can muster a basketball team easy, but who do I suspect if you say the gonif was maybe scared to death? Okay, okay. Hey, wait a minute, Doc."

Ritter suddenly leaned over to touch the washed-out-looking rug at his feet. There was a dark reddish stain under the tips of his fingers, about the size of a lettuce leaf. He tested his fingertips by running his thumb against them.

"All the time I'm talking to you, Doc, I'm staring at a stain in the rug in front of me, and it don't register till just now. It's sort of dark red, and it's still sticky. Should I cut out a piece? How should I know if the rug's an oriental or an occidental? . . . Okay, I'll send the whole rug over with the stiff. Maybe it's his own blood. So goodnight, Doc. See you at Raoul's."

Ritter hung up absent-mindedly and stared for half a minute at the stain on the rug which was an expensive imitation of a rare Savonnerie—not that this fact would have

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prevented him from cutting out the stained portion for analysis. He frowned and gave instructions to Sergeant Brody to make a neat package of the rug and send it to Pasteur Hospital after the coroner had released the body. Then:

"Brody," said the lieutenant, "I want you to put down roots in the entrance hall. Don't let anybody in or out. If the lush comes to—the butler, I mean—flash me. Camp on that phone just off the hall and take all calls. I gotta have words with the caretaker."

Whatever Max Ritter had expected to find in the caretaker's lodge, it was not a diminutive white-haired Henry Inglewood seated in a big leather chair, smoking a pipe and reading while the orphic strains of Strauss's *Death and Transfiguration* filtered eerily from a hi-fi hidden somewhere in the book-lined walls.

"Inglewood?" The little man closed his book and nodded. "You're pretty calm for a guy who's just had his life turned upside down. Or maybe you ain't heard about Pardell?"

"One of your colleagues—I assume you're a police officer—gave me the news."

"It don't seem to get you in much of an uproar."

"Why should it?" said Inglewood. "This is a matter for professionals, and they appear to have the situation well in hand."

"You hated Pardell, didn't you?"

"Not at all." Inglewood paused to relight his pipe. "Why should I?"

"He made a flunkey out of you on your own home grounds."

Inglewood put down his book and spread his hands. "You don't understand. Pardell's buying the house enabled me to pay off my debts. My values changed after my wife died. I'm through reaching for power or position or money. He's given me a place to live with my books and music, and he paid me for looking after the place that I had loved for so many years. His posturing with an obviously false peacock's tail rather amused me. No, I didn't hate Pardell."

"Tell me everything that happened this evening from the time Pardell left for dinner."

"But I've already told—"

"Tell it again."

Patiently Inglewood went over the timetable in detail. Peter Pardell left the house at about six o'clock, driving the Lincoln Continental himself. It was the chauffeur's day off. No, Mrs. Pardell was not with him. She left a few minutes later, driving her own car, a Jaguar.

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She was alone, too. No, neither said anything about a destination or what time they would return. No, he didn't ask.

"What time did Pardell come back?" Ritter asked.

"A little before eight. He drove up to the grille with his horn going like there was an air raid on. When I opened the gate he damn near ran over me, he was in such a hurry. He yelled to close the gate, zoomed up the driveway, skidded to a stop at the front entrance, jumped out without shutting off the ignition or closing the car door. While I was shutting the gates, a taxi drove up, stopped for a second, then went on."

"Who was in the taxi?"

"I couldn't see. It was getting dark. I think it was a yellow cab."

"Then what?"

"I could hear the engine of Mr. Pardell's car still running, so I thought he'd be coming right out again. When he didn't I went into the house to ask if he wanted me to put the car away. I knocked on his study door, but he didn't answer. I knew he was there, because I could hear him talking on the phone. His voice sounded excited, but I couldn't understand what he was saying. I heard a thump, like something falling, then silence. I tried the door. It was locked, so—"

"So naturally your fingerprints are on the doorknob," Ritter interrupted.

"So I drove the car into the garage," Inglewood continued, "and started for the lodge, intending to call the police. But by the time I reached the gate the police cars were already starting to arrive."

"You didn't see anybody in the house?"

"Nobody. I knew the butler was in his subterranean quarters working up to his usual Thursday night nirvana, but I didn't actually see him."

"Tell me, Inglewood; do the Pardells always go out to dinner in separate cars?"

"Not always."

"Why did Mrs. Pardell drive her own car tonight?"

"I wouldn't know—unless she had errands of her own to do." Inglewood was beginning to show signs of annoyance. He got up, crossed the room, banged his pipe against an ashtray, and refilled it with great deliberation. "While I was opening the gate for her she said something about going out to get another dog."

"Now look, Inglewood. A minute ago you said she didn't tell you where she was going. Did she or didn't she tell you?" Ritter's heavy eyebrows bristled.

"She didn't tell me where

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she was going. She merely told me what she was going to do."

"What's she want another dog for?" Ritter got up and bore down on the little man with menacing strides. "Don't she like the dog she's got?"

"You mean Pompidou?" Inglewood smiled. "She's crazy about Pompidou. Feeds him chicken every day. She'd feed him caviar only he doesn't like it." His smile broadened. "Maybe she feels she has been neglecting Pompidou's sex life and has promised him a mate."

Ritter was not amused. He glanced at his watch.

"I'm going to make sure that Pete Pardell's mysterious death gets on the ten o'clock news," he said. "And if the Widow Pardell don't show up here or at my shop before midnight I'll have the State Police of six states looking for her."

Mrs. Pardell did not show up by midnight at either Indian Hill or the Northbank Police Station, and a bulletin had indeed gone out to the police and highway patrols of nearby states to intercept a bright-red Jaguar with a New York license plate and driven by a blonde woman wanted in Northbank as a material witness. Lieutenant Ritter did not accept Dr. Coffee's half-joking theory that Peter Pardell might have been scared to death, although he had certainly been scared. Ritter would have to wait for the autopsy to determine exactly what had killed Pardell during his solitary last moments in his locked study; but locked room or not, he was proceeding on the assumption that it was murder.

Mrs. Pardell had still not made an appearance at 2:00 A.M., when Ritter went back to the station before going home for a few hours' sleep. He had spent most of the intervening time trying to locate Stuart Blount, the inventor who had been defeated in his suit for royalties by Pardell's legal defense of Barzac canneries. When he finally located Blount's son, a Vietnam veteran and a former Green Beret now a rifle instructor at Fort Bragg, N.C., he learned that Blount senior had been confined to a mental hospital in Cincinnati for the past six months. The one phone call seemed to establish alibis for two men who might not have been unhappy to see Peter Pardell dead.

Much of the morning was spent trying to run down Edgar Enfield, the retired bus driver whose daughter had died aborting Pardell's child; but the old man was apparently out of town for the long weekend.

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Ritter also canvassed the taxi companies, hoping to find the cabby who had driven to Indian Hill about the time Pardell had come home, and had, according to the caretaker's story, paused only briefly at the gate. At regular intervals between times Ritter called police headquarters for possible news of Mrs. Pardell (there was none) and Pasteur Hospital for news of Dr. Coffee's autopsy findings. The pathologist, however, was either in the operating room, the laboratory, or the hospital morgue, and consequently was incommunicado.

The one development that seemed to be related to the Pardell case only made the mystery of his death more complex. Just as Ritter was about to leave for his rendezvous with Dr. Coffee, the president of the Northbank First National Bank telephoned.

"I read about Pardell in the paper this morning," said the banker. "I hope you appreciate that what I am about to say is unusual procedure for First National. Without a court order we never disclose details of our customer's transactions. However, in the interests of justice, I thought perhaps it would help you to know that Mr. Pardell withdrew $50,000 in cash from his checking account yesterday afternoon."

"In cash, you say?"

"Yes. In thousand-dollar bills."

"Did Pardell regularly carry a balance that big in his checking account?"

"Well, no. The fifty thousand was deposited last week in the form of a bank draft on New York."

"I see. Well, thanks a lot."

And the detective was still not certain that Pardell had been murdered.

If he had been a nail biter, Ritter's fingers would have been chewed down to the first joint before the sandy mop of Dr. Coffee's hair rose above floor level in the stairwell of Raoul's one-flight-up restaurant.

"Sorry I'm late, Max. But I phoned ahead for calves' brains in brown butter."

"Don't keep me hanging, Doc. Do we have a homicide or did Pardell just die of his own orneriness?"

"We have a homicide, Max. Hello, Raoul." Dr. Coffee interrupted himself to address the swarthy, red-faced French proprietor. "When I phoned this morning did I remember to tell you to chill a bottle of that Livermore Valley gray riesling? Good. Pour us a glass now."

"Doc, you torture me. What killed Pardell?"

"Pardell? Oh. Hemorrhage."

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"But there wasn't any blood on his clothes. And there was just that small stain on the rug in the other room."

"The blood on the rug was not Pardell's. In fact, I'm not even sure it's human blood. His bleeding was all internal. He was shot." The pathologist reached into his pocket and produced a wad of gauze which, unwrapped, disclosed a metal object. "Here's the bullet. It pierced the small intestine in three places and lodged in the liver, severing both the portal vein and the hepatic artery. Rather small caliber, wouldn't you say?"

Ritter nodded. "Not more than .30, I'd say. Probably a Colt .25. But the door is heavy oak and there's no bullet hole in it or in the windows."

"Your man was shot before he locked himself in. Ah, Raoul, the brains." Dr. Coffee beamed. *Cervelles au beurre noir* was a dish he never got at home; Mrs. Coffee did not consider calves' brains fit for human consumption.

"Please avoid to burn yourselves, messieurs," said Raoul. "The plates is very 'ot."

"You're kidding, Doc," said Ritter. "The guy drove himself home. When he phoned me he thought the perpetrator was outside the door and closing in on him."

"He was shot before he got home and probably didn't realize he'd been hit."

"Come on, Doc! Don't give me—"

"There are plenty of similar cases in the literature of forensic medicine," said the pathologist. "The classic is the New York police sergeant who chased a gunman in the subway. Before he caught and disarmed his man he was shot at close range, but didn't know it. He phoned for help, dragged his man up the stairs, and held him until a police car arrived. He didn't collapse and die until ten minutes after he'd been shot.

"Your Pardell apparently conked out while he was talking to you on the phone. More wine, Max?"

The detective held out his glass. "Where do we go from here? Any ideas?"

Dr. Coffee nodded as he put down the slender bottle. "Yes," he said. "Dr. Mookerji is at this moment engaged in higher mathematics, trying to estimate the time lapse between the shooting and Pardell's collapse. By measuring the amount of blood taken from the peritoneal cavity we may be able to approximate the distance Pardell was from home when he was shot. Have you a record of the exact time Pardell phoned you?"

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"I'd just come on duty," Ritter replied. "So it must have been eight o'clock, give or take a minute or two."

The pathologist seemed engrossed in mopping his plate with a heel of French bread. Then: "I may be able to tell you about when Pardell finished dinner—if he ate dinner. When Dr. Mookerji finishes his blood-loss estimation we're going to make an analysis of stomach contents. That may give us a clue to when Pardell finished dinner last evening. We may even be able to guess where he ate."

"Come on, Doc. You got ESP?"

The pathologist laughed. "Not quite. But the progress of digestion before it was stopped by death may be a valuable indication. And the stomach contents may show us the approximate menu, which in turn may tell us where he had dinner. Tell me, Max, have you any leads?"

Ritter finished the last of his white wine, put down his glass, and unbuttoned the top button of his trousers before he gave a brief rundown on the men who may have had good reason to kill Pardell.

"And I don't write off Griselda Pardell either," Ritter concluded."

"Griselda?" Dr. Coffee smiled. "I take it she is the patient and virtuous wife of Peter Pardell?"

"I can't say how patient and virtuous she is." The detective shook his head. "I only saw her once or twice, but offhand she don't quite fit your description, Doc."

"Not my description, Max. Griselda is the namesake of the good bourgeoise helpmate celebrated by Boccaccio, Petrarch and Chaucer, among others."

"You got me there, Doc. She strikes me as a sexy dame, a brassy blonde who dresses like she's afraid people won't know she's female. Nobody saw her since she left the nest just a few minutes after Pardell took off."

"Raoul, the check please. I think you better come back to the hospital with me, Max. Dr. Mookerji may have some clues by this time."

Dr. Mookerji was still engrossed in his search for evidence when the police detective and the pathologist entered the laboratories of Pasteur Hospital. Motilal Mookerji, M.D., resident pathologist at Pasteur, had brought a keen scientific mind and creative curiosity from Calcutta to Northbank. He was perched on a stool in front of a high workbench, a spheroidal figure with the tail of his pink turban dangling over the back of his

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white smock. He was bending over a microscope.

"Hi, Swami!" Ritter said. "Good to see you up to your navel in murder again. Any progress?"

At the detective's greeting the Hindu turned. "Salaam, Leftenant. Five times greetings, Doctor Sahib." He slid off his stool. "Am presently completing assay of basic components of deceased's final repast. To date am of opinion that after-dinner life span of murder subject was somewhat truncated."

"On what evidence, Doctor?" asked Dr. Coffee.

"Please examine classified menu *in vitro*," said Dr. Mookerji, "and note almost instant arrest of digestive process." His pudgy brown fingers made a sweeping gesture toward the rack of test tubes.

Dr. Coffee selected several and held them up to the light one by one.

"We can't tell much from the carbohydrates," he explained to Ritter, "because starches start digesting even before they're swallowed. He does seem to have eaten some bread and potatoes, however."

"I hope it looked more yummy before eating," the detective commented.

"We can't tell anything from the cellulose either," Dr. Coffee continued. "Leafy vegetables and fruit skins pass through the whole digestive tract practically unchanged."

"Please observe proteins, Doctor Sahib."

"Great stars!" Dr. Coffee put on his horn-rimmed spectacles and carried several test tubes closer to the window. He indicated to Ritter several morsels of what appeared to be meat of some kind. "You're right, Dr. Mookerji," he said. Turning to Ritter he called attention to the fact that the substance appeared practically intact. While it usually takes two to three hours for meat to be entirely digested in the stomach, he explained, the gastric juices begin their work almost at once and the meat begins to be slightly frayed around the edges at the end of only half an hour.

"Max, your man must have been murdered soon after dinner," he concluded, "practically for dessert, you might say.

"Doris," he called to the pretty dark-haired technician hovering at the edge of the group, "have we any animal antiserum in the house?"

"We sure have, Doctor," Doris Hudson replied, "a comprehensive assortment ever since the Mannock case."

"Pig antiserum, Doris?"

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"I think so. Let me look." The technician moved across the lab with the grace of a mannequin; her white smock might have been designed by Dior. She opened the refrigerator door and studied the labels on several ampoules. "Yes, we have pig antiserum."

"Then get out your pipettes and saline solution. I want you and Dr. Mookerji to run a precipitin test right away on the protein in these two test tubes. Cut away the surfaces that have been in contact with the gastric juices, then do the usual. I expect we may find your man had been eating sausage, Max.

"Dr. Mookerji, what does the amount of blood in the abdominal cavity indicate?"

"Identical finding confirming arrested digestive progress," the Hindu resident said. "To wit, am of opinion that death took place within ten to fifteen minutes after bullet entered intimate anatomy. Am therefore offering collateral opinion that shot was fired immediately after deceased gentleman departed from restaurant or equivalent dining accommodations."

"Make a note of that, Max." Dr. Coffee squinted at the test tubes as he handed them to Doris Hudson. The grimace might have indicated biting into an unripe persimmon or having an undissolved aspirin stuck in his throat. Actually it was merely a sign of intensive cerebration. "Doris," he resumed, "before you pucker up your pretty lips around a pipette, will you bring the rest of the test tubes into my office? I'm going to try to give Lieutenant Ritter an X on which to mark the spot of the murder."

The pathologist carried the detective along as he took each step in his analysis of Peter Pardell's last meal. The menu had apparently included sausage of large circumference—the precipitin test would probably confirm this—which Pardell did not chew very well; he must have eaten in a hurry. Then there were filaments of vegetable matter in another test tube, conceivably sauerkraut which ordinarily negotiates the entire digestive tract unchanged. The material in another tube was also untouched. The small pointed objects appeared to be caraway or cumin seeds; the rounded ones either juniper berries or peppercorns or both.

"Therefore," the pathologist concluded, "I think we can surmise that your old classmate's final menu was prepared by a German or Alsatian chef, or one at least trained in the Teutonic tradition of

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cooking sauerkraut with the spices we have here and garnished with knockwurst and perhaps a slice of ham and a boiled potato. Now if—"

"Gluck!" Ritter interrupted. "Otto Gluck's a big beer-and-rathskeller man, even if he was born in Brooklyn. But why would Pardell be having chow with a guy he double-crossed and sent to jail? Why—"

The phone rang. Doris Hudson poked her head in the doorway and said, "It's for you, Lieutenant."

Ritter picked up the extension on Dr. Coffee's desk.

"Hi, Brody. She did? . . . Nobody but me, hey? Okay. I'll be right along."

He hung up. "Griselda Pardell just turned up at the station house," he said. "Heard on the radio I was looking for her. See you later, folks."

Ritter heard Griselda Pardell sounding off to the sergeant who manned the information desk long before he had reached the top of the stairway.

"Here's the lieutenant, ma'am," said the relieved sergeant.

Griselda whirled. She was a small woman, but she advanced on Ritter with big angry strides, preceded by a long aggressive chin, an impressive bosom, and an inch and a half of false eyelashes. Ritter took her arm to swing her into a complete turn.

"Let's go inside my cosy little office, Griselda," he said. "Where the hell have you been?"

Griselda didn't reply until they had crossed the squad room and Ritter had closed the door and offered her a chair. She sat down and crossed her legs to display a generous expanse of panty hose. Then, "It's Mrs. Pardell to you."

"Okay, Mrs. Pardell. Where the hell have you been?"

"What's it to you where I've been? I'm here now."

"Look, Mrs. Pardell Griselda, let's not banter about the bush. Somebody knocked off your husband. Or hadn't you heard?"

"I heard it on my car radio. That's why I came back."

"Where did you come back from, Mrs. Pardell?"

"I'm not sure if it was eastern Ohio or western Pennsylvania or maybe West Virginia."

"Where were you driving to when you heard the news and turned back?" Ritter asked.

Griselda paused to light a cigarette before she replied. "New York," she said, "where I belong."

"Like leaving your husband, Mrs. Pardell?"

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"Yes, I was, as long as he wanted to stay in this hick town. As far as I'm concerned, Northbank is strictly for the birds, and I don't mean nighthawks, either. You were a friend of Pete's, I heard."

"Not exactly. We went to the same high school," Ritter said.

"Pete didn't have any friends, I guess. He was sort of a louse, at that."

"Was your marriage busting up, Mrs. Pardell?"

"Not really. We got along better when we were in different cities is all."

"Do you know of anybody who wanted to kill your husband?"

"Are you kidding?" Griselda laughed. "A dozen at least, but they didn't have the nerve. There was one guy who called up every time we came to Northbank and threatened to kill Pete. Wrote to him in New York, daring him to come back to Northbank. Silly old coot never followed through. Pete knocked up his daughter once."

"Erica Enfield," Ritter said. "She died."

Griselda stood up, dropped her cigarette, and stepped on it. She yawned. "I'm pooped," she said. "Drove half the night. Got only a few hours' sleep in a lousy motel and then drove all morning to come back after I heard the news. I'm going home."

"Sit down," said Ritter. "I ain't through yet. Where did Pardell have dinner last night?"

"I wouldn't know."

"Why didn't you have dinner with him?"

"I didn't want to. Pete knew I was driving east."

"Who'd he eat with then?"

"Some car hop, probably. I don't keep track of every roundheel he feeds hamburgers in a roadhouse."

"Mrs. Pardell, do you know Otto Gluck?"

"I know who he is."

"Is he in Northbank?"

Griselda yawned again. As she put her hand in front of her mouth Ritter noticed that one of the long iridescent false fingernails she was wearing was missing from her right hand. The exposed real nail of the fourth finger was bitten down to the quick. "Pete didn't mention it if he is," she said.

The telephone rang.

"Homicide. Ritter. Yeah, Brody . . . Sure, bring him in. Now." Ritter turned to Griselda. "Okay, Mrs. Pardell, go home and catch some shuteye. But don't leave town."

Griselda left as Sergeant Brody came in with a long-haired bearded youth. Ritter motioned with his chin, and the sergeant abandoned his charge

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to follow the Widow Pardell.

"You're a cabby?" Ritter's eyebrows rose incredulously.

"I drive nights," said the long-haired one. "In the daytime I study Oriental Philosophy at Northbank U. The office said you were looking for a man who drove a fare to Indian Hill at about eight last night. I guess I'm the guy."

The bearded cabby described his passenger as a wiry nervous man of about 55 with steel-gray hair and deep-set piercing eyes.

"I picked him up on Taft Avenue, just at the foot of the Coolidge Street hill," the cabby said. "He was out of breath. I guess he'd been running. He started to say, 'Follow that Lincoln' but there wasn't any Lincoln in sight. So he gave me the Indian Hill address, but when we pulled up at the gate a little old white-haired character was just closing it, so my fare changed his mind. He had me drive him to the bus terminal. It wasn't till I read the morning papers that I connected him with the gun."

"Gun?" Ritter's outsized Adam's apple gave a startled bob. "What gun?"

"When I pulled in the hack at midnight there was a .38 revolver stuck behind the backseat cushion. I turned it in to the Lost and Found Department at the garage."

"Lost and—!" The detective jumped up, as though to hurdle the desk.

"I got it back and brought it along." The cabby pulled a pistol from his pocket and handed it to Ritter. "I suppose I've messed up the fingerprints," he added apologetically.

"Lucky for you that prints almost never show up on a handgun." Ritter broke the pistol. There were two spent shells in the cylinder. "Gee zuzz!" he exclaimed, as he went into action.

He summoned the Chief of Ballistics and gave him the revolver, also the bullet Dr. Coffee had removed from the late Peter Pardell's liver.

He mobilized a dozen detectives to run down friends and relatives of Eric Enfield in an effort to find out where he had gone from the bus terminal.

At the end of a frantic quarter hour he realized that the bearded taxi driver was still sitting in his office.

"Hey!" he said. "You didn't tell me your name."

"Oh. Calistratus Browning. The kids call me Cal."

"Thanks, Cal, for your help. You're a useful citizen. If you think of anything else about this guy who forgets his artillery in your cab, phone me." Ritter shook hands across

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the desk and nodded his dismissal.

For the next ten minutes Ritter made notes on the back of an old envelope, trying to muster his evidence to date in some modicum of order. He was on his way to Ballistics to see if the comparison microscope had made any progress when his telephone rang again. Sergeant Brody was on the line.

"I been following the dame in the Jaguar," said Brody, "and she didn't go to Indian Hill like you said she would. She drove to the Northbank Pet Cemetery out beyond Harding Park."

"What the hell is she doing at a pet cemetery?"

"Well, she opened the back of the Jaguar and took out a sort of a picnic basket which she dropped. The basket came open and a dead pooch fell out. A white poodle with like bloodstains on its fur. She put the poodle back in the basket and took it inside the cemetery office. Want me to go in after her?"

"I want you to intercept the dame and commandeer the canine corpse. Don't let her talk you out of it."

"Okay. What do I arrest her for?"

"If she argues, we're holding her as a material witness. But I want Griselda again, and I want that dead pup. Drive them both to Pasteur Hospital. I'll meet you there as soon as you can make it. In Dr. Coffee's lab."

"Oh, hello, Max," said Dr. Coffee, replacing his phone in its cradle. "Believe it or not, I was just about to dial your number. Two things. First, that stain on the rug you sent me is definitely not human blood. The red cells are not nucleated, so it's mammalian blood, but the precipitin test proved negative with human antiserum. If you have to know—"

"I think I already know," Ritter interrupted. "I'll lay you fifty to one it's dog's blood. And the dog in question ought to be along any minute. The name is Pompidou, and it's dead. Ever do a P.M. on a poodle, Doc?"

The pathologist didn't know whether to laugh or not. He stared at the detective with a quizzical expression.

"Are you serious, Max?"

"Wait and see. How'd you make out on Pete Pardell's last supper?"

"Doris and Dr. Mookerji have confirmed that the menu was Teutonic. But that's not what I was calling you about. In reviewing the results of the Pardell autopsy I found I overlooked one rather perplexing aspect."

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"Like what, Doc?"

"The course of the bullet. You see, the entry wound was in the lower right quadrant—that is, here just under the bulge of his abdomen close to the right flank." Dr. Coffee poked a forefinger into Ritter's belly. "It plowed a slanting upward course for seven or eight inches before lodging in the liver. Here." Again the forefinger illustrated. "Now since the bullet was not deflected by any bone structure, your man must have been lying down when he was shot. Either that or he was standing on something considerably higher than the man who fired the shot, perhaps on a stairway. That seems more likely than a stepladder. Know any good German restaurants in Northbank, Max, that have two floors and a staircase?"

Ritter frowned and scratched his ears. "Nope," he said, "but there's the Lorelei on the Coolidge Street hill with outside stone stairs that lead up from a beer garden. Hey, a cabby picked up a guy on Taft Avenue near there last night and drove him to Indian Hill just after Pardell got there. The guy left a revolver in the cab. I wonder—?"

Ritter's cogitation was interrupted by the arrival of an indignant Mrs. Pardell accompanied by Sergeant Brody with a picnic basket under his free arm.

Mrs. Pardell was loudly indignant during her introduction to Dr. Coffee. She was a citizen and a taxpayer and she knew her rights. If she was going to be dragged in for questioning every hour on the hour she wanted her attorney present.

"We just wanted to ask what you were doing with a dead dog in the back of your car," Ritter said. "If you think you might incriminate yourself by answering questions about Pompidou, sure, go ahead and phone your attorney."

"I was taking Pompidou home to be buried in the garden of our Connecticut place," Griselda said. Ritter noticed that her fists were clenched. "When I turned back because of Peter's death, I thought I'd better let the pet cemetery here take care of sending him east."

"What happened to your dog, Mrs. Pardell?" Dr. Coffee asked.

"Poor thing, he had an accident," Griselda said. "He was quite old, you know, and he didn't see well any more. I'd been away all afternoon, and when I came home he was so happy to recognize my voice at the door that he ran full speed to meet me and crashed into

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some furniture. He must have cracked his poor llittle skull because he died almost at once. I felt very badly, because I loved Pompidou dearly."

"Yes. Sure," Ritter said. "You'll leave Pompidou here with Dr. Coffee for a few hours, won't you?"

"Here? Why?"

"We'll give you a receipt, and a guarantee to deliver the dog to the Northbank Pet Cemetery later today for embalming or shipment to New York or whatever you want done, Mrs. Pardell."

The argument which ensued was cut short when Ritter declared: "Look, Griselda—and don't give me that high-horse 'Mrs. Pardell-to-you' routine. Dr. Coffee might think it's funny that you get all upset about poor Pompidou's carcass when you don't let out a yip of concern about your late husband's mortal remains. And I advise you, Griselda, to go home and take care of that pooped feeling you were complaining about an hour ago. And don't leave town."

"I tried to make arrangements for my husband," said Griselda, "but the undertaker tells me you won't release the body."

"He'll be all yours in a day or so, Griselda, so don't worry your pretty little head."

With a sniff and a swish of her miniskirt Griselda spun on her heel and headed for the door.

The phone rang.

"For you, Leftenant," said Dr. Mookerji who answered.

Griselda paused in the laboratory doorway.

"Hello. This is Ritter . . . At the airport, you say? You frisked him? Clean? He did? . . . How much? Gee zuzz! Okay, bring him in. I'll be there." He turned to Dr. Coffee as he replaced the instrument. "We just picked up Otto Gluck at the airport. He had fifty grand in big bills on him. He was trying to charter a plane."

Griselda came back a few steps. "That reminds me," she said. "I think I forgot to mention that Pete said something about having dinner with Otto Gluck last night."

"Now you're telling me?"

"Well, it must have slipped my mind until I heard you mention the name just now."

"You mean just casual-like Pete decided he might have dinner with the guy who went to the pen because of Pete's testimony? He wasn't afraid of Gluck?"

"Pete wasn't afraid of anybody."

"He sure as hell was afraid of somebody when he phoned me just before he died. Come on,

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Griselda, let's get out of here and let Dr. Coffee get to work."

Otto "Odds-on" Gluck was an improbable-looking character. Scarcely five feet tall, he weighed at least 200 pounds, and the way his clothes hung on him suggested that he had weighed another hundred before he began his years of prison fare. He was completely bald. His tiny blue eyes were almost invisible, as were his pale eyebrows against the tallowy pallor of his skin.

"What's wrong I should have a few Gs in bills in my pocket?" Gluck asked. His mouth opened wide in astonishment, displaying two gold teeth gleaming like headlights in a traffic tunnel. "In a couple hours I would be home in Brooklyn and the money would be in the bank. My bank and my account. What's wrong with that?"

"What's wrong is that you're not supposed to leave New York state without the permission of your probation officer," said Lieutenant Ritter. "I'm picking you up for New York parole violation."

"He's a nice guy, my probation officer," Gluck said. "He wouldn't make it a Federal case for just a few hours. I left New York yesterday afternoon. I'm back tonight, if you let me."

"Where did the money come from?"

"It's strictly a business deal. Strictly legitimate."

"You had dinner with Peter Pardell last night?"

"Yes."

"At the Lorelei?"

"Yeah."

"Did Pardell pay you the money you had on you or did you take it after you shot him?"

"I didn't shoot Pardell. And where the money came from is strictly a business deal. Do I get it back or do I have to sue?"

"Did you see Pardell get shot?" Ritter persisted.

"Hell, no. I didn't even know he was shot till I woke up this afternoon and read the papers. When Pete left me last night he was in a hurry. Don't ask me why. He let me pick up the tab. I waited for my change and by the time I left the joint, Pete was gone."

"What did you do with the gun?"

"Look, Captain, I never carried a gat in my life. I'm just a betting man, not a muscle man."

Ritter was making notes on the back of an old envelope. "Where'd you go after you left the Lorelei?" he asked.

"I had a date." Gluck's gold teeth gleamed.

"Who with?"

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"An old friend. No good giving you her name because she'll deny it. She's married. Her husband's out of town."

"You wouldn't give me her name even to save yourself from a murder rap?"

"I'm a gentleman. You're supposed to be a detective. Find out for yourself where I spent the night—if you can."

"You still want us to believe you had a friendly dinner with the man whose testimony sent you up the river?"

"Why not? Pardell was just telling the truth. I did try to bribe him. It was my mistake all around. Can I go take my plane now?"

Ritter shook his head. "I'm holding you as a material witness," he said.

There were three important developments in the Peter Pardell murder case during the night of Friday-Saturday.

First, Dr. Coffee reported to Lieutenant Ritter that he had completed the post-mortem examination of Pompidou, Griselda Pardell's white poodle—the first time he had done an autopsy on a dog since medical school—and that Pompidou had come to a violent end. The dog had been shot. The pathologist had recovered the bullet, which was in almost perfect condition, and was sending it to Ritter.

Second, on passing the bullet to Ballistics, Ritter learned that the .38 revolver which a passenger had left behind the back seat of a taxicab had been traced by its serial number. The gun had been stolen some years earlier from the locker room of the security guards at the bus terminal. This seemed to confirm Ritter's assumption that the passenger had been Eric Enfield, the retired bus driver. He detailed more detectives to the safari hunting Enfield.

The ten o'clock newscast announced the intensified search for Enfield, following the identification of the revolver.

The third break came at thirty-five minutes past midnight just as Ritter was about to go home for a few hours' sleep, a shower, a shave, and a clean shirt.

Eric Enfield walked into the police station to give himself up.

"I heard on the radio you were looking for me," he told Ritter, "so I thought I'd save you the trouble. You're looking for the right guy. I killed Pardell."

Ritter's Adam's apple bobbed twice. "If you're making a statement," he said, "I got to warn you that anything you say can be used

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against you. You can call an attorney if you want."

"I don't need an attorney."

"Then wait till I get a tape recorder."

"I don't want to wait. I want to get it off my chest. I've been laying for him ever since the skunk killed my beautiful Erica. I told him I was going to kill him. I wrote him and I phoned him, and he just laughed. I hated him. I'm glad he's dead."

"Tell me how you killed him," Ritter said.

Enfield tried to light a cigarette. His hand trembled. His thin angular face grimaced nervously. When his match went out Ritter offered him a light.

"I stole the gun from the bus terminal when I made up my mind I had to kill him," he said. "Several times before I had tried, but each time I lost my nerve. I knew it had to be that night. I waited outside the Lorelei. As soon as he came out I fired. He sort of ducked and his feet went out from under him. He landed flat on his back on the stairs. I must have missed because he jumped up and started running. I fired again but he kept running, so I thought I'd missed again. When I got to the foot of the Coolidge Street hill he was just driving off. I hailed a taxi and tried to follow him to his place on Indian Hill, but the old caretaker was closing the gates just as I got there."

"Then what?" asked Ritter. He shoved an ashtray across his desk.

"I could have kicked myself from here to Cincinnati and back. I thought I'd muffed my chance. I went to the terminal and took a bus. I just rode, I didn't care where. I got a lifetime pass, you know. I drove for Northbank Transport for twenty-five years. I don't know where I got off. I went in a bar and had a few beers. That's where I heard the news on teevee that he was dead after all. I was glad for Erica. I laughed and cried. The bartender musta thought I was crazy."

Watching the strange light that flickered in Enfield's deep-set eyes, Ritter thought maybe the bartender had been right. He said, "How'd you know Pardell was at the Lorelei?"

Enfield tamped out his cigarette. "I got a phone call," he said.

"Who phoned you?"

"I don't know."

"Whadya mean you don't know?"

"Some woman called and said if I was still looking for Pete Pardell he'd be eating at the Lorelei at seven. She hung

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up before I could ask who she was. I didn't care really. Here was the chance I'd been waiting for all these years."

"You didn't recognize her voice?"

"No. And then tonight I heard on the newscast you'd traced the gun, so I came in."

"You're lucky we don't have capital punishment in this state, Enfield." Ritter snapped the switch on his intercom. "Mac, Ritter. We got a lodger for the night." He nodded to Enfield. "You'll spend the night in our detention cell here. We'll see the D.A. in the morning. He'll take your statement and I'll file a complaint for Murder One."

Max Ritter slept soundly. The pressure was off the Pardell case, and he was not officially on duty again until 8:00 in the evening. He had things to do before then, of course, but there was no hurry. He would book Enfield when he was good and ready and then swear to the murder complaint. The District Attorney never got in before ten, so Ritter could have a leisurely breakfast.

He put the water on and carefully measured the coffee for his drip pot. He had been making his own breakfast ever since his mother died, and he could never bring himself to such short cuts as instant coffee. He bisected a bagel and dropped the halves into his pop-up toaster. Then he settled down with a glass of grapefruit juice and the morning *Tribune*.

He was gratified that the *Tribune*, which never lost a chance to depict the Northbank Police Department as only a notch above the Keystone Cops, devoted two columns on page one to the Pardell murder case. Curiously, the arrest of Odds-on Gluck at the airport with the mysterious bankroll in his possession got almost as big a play as the confession of Eric Enfield. *Father Avenges Dead Daughter's Betrayal*, read the top headline. *Big Shot Gambler with Mystery Greenbacks Held As Material Witness*, the second line read.

That reminded Ritter that he'd better get on the phone to New York this morning and arrange to delay Gluck's return for parole violation, perhaps until after the trial.

The teakettle whistled, the toaster popped, and the phone rang simultaneously. Ritter let the phone ring while he poured the boiling water over the coffee grounds.

"Max, this is MacPherson, Ballistics. You keeping a banker's hours today?"

"I've been up for hours, Scottie. I've played nine holes of golf and three sets of tennis,

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and I just stepped outa the shower."

"I read in the papers you plan to book Enfield this morning for Murder One. Right?"

"Right. In about an hour."

"Don't do it, Max."

"Why not, Scottie? He confessed."

"Suit yourself, Max. But he didn't shoot Pardell."

"You're kidding." Ritter's Adam's apple was acting up again. "He says he shot him as he left the Lorelei Tavern."

"He's crazy," said the ballistics expert. "That gun you brought me is a Smith and Wesson .38 which has a right-hand twist to the rifling. The bullet that killed Pardell was fired from a .25 caliber, probably a Colt, and has a left-hand twist."

Ritter swallowed twice. "Gee zuzz!" he said.

"And here's another goodie for you," said MacPherson. "That bullet you brought me yesterday that you said killed Mrs. Pardell's dog—it was fired from the same gun that killed Pardell."

"Scottie, you've made my day." Ritter sighed. "I guess we start all over." He hung up.

The police car stopped at Pasteur Hospital to pick up Dr. Coffee. Saturday was a slow day for the pathologist. He had done one biopsy on an early operation and had already finished reading the previous day's surgicals, so he agreed to accompany Max Ritter.

"We got a date with Griselda in an hour, Doc," Ritter explained as Dr. Coffee got in beside him. "But first we stop at the scene of the murder for another look. Everybody's lying their heads off, and I want you to size up people and places before I start yelling a few lies myself."

"What are you cooking up, Max?"

"First I want you to see the lay of the land and tell me how it fits in with the direction of the bullet in Pardell's body," said Ritter. "I got Eric Enfield coming over to show how he shot Pardell, only my ballistics people say he didn't. Either he's nuts or he's protecting somebody."

"Which do you think?"

Ritter stopped for a red light. "I think he's so worked up he can't shoot straight. Next I bring over Otto Gluck who says he don't even hear any shots. I got some of the Lorelei night staff coming over to check out his story."

The lights changed. The police car turned into Taft Avenue.

"Did you ever consider," Dr.

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Coffee asked, "that Enfield may have deliberately left the .38 in the cab to throw you off, knowing he had shot Pardell with another gun?"

"I have," Ritter replied, "but you answered that one in the negative."

"I did?"

"When you sent me the bullets. I guess I didn't tell you that the same gun killed Pardell and Mrs. Pardell's dog. I can't figure why Enfield wanted to kill Griselda's dog even if he wanted to knock off Pardell."

The car climbed the Coolidge Street hill and stopped at the foot of the incline leading to the Lorelei Tavern. Two other police cars were already parked there. In the grilled-off back seat of one car sat Otto Gluck, handcuffed. Eric Enfield, also manacled, sat in the other car.

"Brody, bring Gluck up to the tavern now," Ritter ordered. "Jenkins, I'll want Enfield in ten minutes."

The detective and the pathologist walked up the sloping approach to the restaurant. The cement pathway, broken every twenty feet by two or three steps, was lined on each side by a neatly trimmed boxwood hedge. There were linden trees behind the hedges and an occasional stone bench in front. Two very Teutonic-looking statues of Rhine maidens flanked the broad stairway leading into the tavern.

The confrontation of Otto Gluck and the Lorelei personnel did not advance Ritter's case. The maitre d' confirmed the vital details of Gluck's story. Gluck and Pardell had dined together in a private room at the back of the tavern. Gluck had remained behind to pay the bill when Pardell left. Gluck had waited for his change and left perhaps five minutes after his dinner companion. It was quite possible that Gluck had not heard shots being fired in front. The maitre d' himself had not heard any shooting. An orchestra was playing in the main part of the restaurant.

"German bands like to play loud," he said.

Gluck refused to give further explanation of the $50,000 he was carrying when arrested beyond repeating it was a legitimate business deal.

Eric Enfield willingly reenacted his version of the shooting of Peter Pardell. He had waited for Pardell for more than an hour, sitting on a stone bench near the foot of the stairs. Which bench?

"That one right there. At the right of the stairs."

"Your right?" asked Dr. Coffee. "Or Pardell's right?"

"My right. I was sitting on

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this bench, and I got up when he came out of the restaurant," Enfield said. "I yelled at him and started shooting."

"You said he ducked and fell," said Dr. Coffee. "How far down the staircase had he come when he fell?"

"About halfway. His feet went out from under him. He fell flat on his back. Then he got up and ran like hell. I couldn't catch him."

Ritter gestured to his sergeant. "Okay, Jenkins. Take him away."

As they walked back to the car Dr. Coffee said, "Your ballistics man was right, Max. If Enfield is telling the truth about where he stood, he couldn't possibly have fired the bullet I took out of Pardell's liver. The entrance wound is on the wrong side."

"You in a hurry to get back to the hospital?" Ritter asked as he started the car.

"This is my day off, Max," Dr. Coffee said. "If you don't mind I'll follow through with you. I'm hooked on this case."

"Then be my guest. We're going to Indian Hill. You never told me how you sized up Griselda, Doc."

"I'm just a pathologist, Max, not a physiognomist or a clinical psychologist. Anyhow, I've only seen her for about ten minutes."

"She strike you as a nervous type, maybe with a bad case of the jitters?"

Dr. Coffee ran his long fingers through his graying mop of hair as he pondered his answer.

"Yes," he said at last, "I'd judge she was under tension."

"Jumpy," said Ritter. "Fit to climb walls. How do I know? She wears false pearly fingernails. Some time Thursday night she loses one and I see the real nail underneath is chewed down to the quick. She bites her nails. When I first see her yesterday, she doesn't know the phony nail is gone until she sees me staring at it. Then she quickly closes her fist. So if she don't know where she loses it—"

Ritter chuckled. "Then I got another hunch. I think it was Griselda phoned Enfield that Pardell was eating at the Lorelei. Some dame does. When I phoned Griselda this morning to make a date I let Enfield listen on another extension."

"And he identified her voice?"

"He did not. But Griselda don't know that, Doc."

Ritter stopped the car in front of the wrought-iron portals of the Indian Hill estate and fingered the siren into a long impatient wail. After a moment the diminutive figure

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of Henry Inglewood appeared to open the gates. A kitchen apron was tied around his middle.

Ritter drove in, braked, cut the ignition, and got out.

"Inglewood," he said, "meet Dr. Coffee. He's a scientific criminologist, so don't give him any of that jazz you were handing me. We want to talk to you."

"Yes, of course. Come in," said Inglewood, pushing open the door to the lodge. "Please excuse me a moment while I turn off the stove. I was cooking myself a little lunch."

He disappeared into the kitchen. The hi-fi was playing somewhere among the bookcases, and the mellifluous strains of Debussy's "Girl with the Flaxen Hair" mingled with the aroma of frying onions. The white-haired little man reappeared, wiping the perspiration from his forehead with the hem of the apron.

"Where's the gun?" Ritter demanded.

Inglewood smiled. "I don't own a gun," he said.

"Don't give me that spit!" Ritter raised his voice. "The records of the license bureau don't lie. You want me to believe you never registered a handgun?"

Inglewood sat down suddenly. Again he raised the apron to mop his brow. "I'd forgotten," he said. "It was years ago. I should have transferred the registration when I sold it to Mr. Pardell. It went with the house, like all the furnishings."

"It was a .25 caliber Colt, wasn't it?"

"I really don't remember. I know nothing about firearms. I'd bought it at my late wife's insistence. It was in the drawer of the desk in the study. I haven't seen it since we made the inventory. As far as I know, it's still in the desk."

Ritter glanced quizzically at Dr. Coffee as though to ask: do we believe this guy? There was no reaction from the pathologist.

"Why did you lie to me about Pompidou?" Ritter demanded.

"I haven't lied to you about anything, Lieutenant."

"You told me Mrs. Pardell maybe is going to do something about her dog's sex life, and all the time the dog was dead. Didn't you know the dog was dead?"

"No. That is, honestly I didn't know when I spoke to you last." Inglewood was perspiring again.

"Who killed the dog and why?"

"I don't know."

Ritter directed his Saint-Bernard eyes toward Dr. Coffee

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in an unspoken request for an opinion. Dr. Coffee's expression was noncommittal.

"Think it over some more, Inglewood," the detective said. "We'll be back."

"What gun?" asked Griselda Pardell. She sat down, crossed her silken legs above the knee, and draped both arms loosely over the arms of the chair. All ten false iridescent fingernails were in place.

"The gun your husband kept in his desk drawer," said Ritter. "The .25 caliber Colt that used to belong to Ingelwood."

Griselda shrugged. "It must still be in the desk drawer," she said, "if that's where Pete kept it."

Ritter started pulling out desk drawers. In the third drawer he found the Colt. It had not been there the night Pardell was killed. He sniffed the muzzle; it smelled of oil. He slid out the magazine. There were no bullets missing.

"Who reloaded this for you, Griselda?" he asked. "Inglewood?"

"You've lost me," Griselda said. "I'm not good at riddles."

"Look," said Ritter. "No games. Ballistic will testify in court that this was the gun that killed your husband. Your trick didn't work. You try to get Enfield to do your dirty work, but he can't shoot straight. But you phoned him that Pete Pardell was eating at the Lorelei."

"You're out of your mind!"

"Am I? I had Enfield on an extension phone this morning when I called you, so he could listen to your voice."

"What does that prove, Lieutenant?" Griselda reached for a cigarette. Dr. Coffee struck a match for her.

"Proof comes from Dr. Coffee here," Ritter said. "He'll tell the jury how Enfield shot and missed from the north side of the stairway, while you fired from your ambush on the south side when Pardell was flat on his back. Doc's autopsy report would put you right in the chair if the legislature hadn't abolished capital punishment last year."

Griselda blew a long shaft of smoke toward Ritter. "Very ingenious," she said. "And just how do you expect to place me behind that hedge?"

Ritter winked so broadly at Dr. Coffee that half his face was involved. "Griselda honey," he said. "You forget you lost one of your pretty mother-of-pearl fingernails Thursday night."

Griselda opened her mouth to speak, but no words came. She remained motionless, lips parted, as the seconds ticked by. Her eyes grew bright and

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one tear crawled down her left cheek. Suddenly she sprang up. Her cigarette had burned down to her fingers. A shower of sparks followed the downward stroke of her hand. With her toe she crushed the butt into the carpet. The laugh she attempted sounded more like a whimper.

"I guess I must be pretty stupid at that," she said.

"Tell us about the dog, Mrs. Pardell," Dr. Coffee asked. "Can you explain why he was shot with the same gun that killed your husband?"

Griselda sniffled and dabbed at her nose with a wisp of handkerchief. "Pete killed Pompidou," she said. "Pompidou hated Pete. He lifted a leg on Pete's Kirman-Levehr rug Thursday afternoon, so Pete chased him into the reception room and shot him. He put the gun back in his desk drawer. When he left I took the gun because I thought it would be only poetic justice if—"

"Don't tell me you killed Pardell just because he killed your dog," said Ritter.

"No. Pompidou was just the last straw. Being married to Pardell was hell with no high water. He was more of a sadist than the marquis himself."

"Why did you put up with him for so long?" Dr. Coffee asked. "Why didn't you divorce him?"

Griselda laughed bitterly. "For the same reason I married him in the first place. He had my father over a barrel. Father is a highly respected and successful corporation lawyer, but he'd got himself mixed up with a gambling syndicate. Pete Pardell held all the cards and he played them well. He blackmailed his way into my father's law firm. He blackmailed me into marriage.

"I guess I have some kind of father fixation. I thought I'd be able to stand the gaff better than my male ancestor, but Pete succeeded in arousing in me emotions I had never felt before for anyone—loathing, disgust, horror—you name it, he inspired it.

"Curiously enough, he never tried to touch me. He thought he was torturing me, because he brought other women home with him. God knows what he did to them, but as far as I could tell, he only wanted to humiliate me. That was part of his life plan. My sole reason for existence was ornamental—the beautiful daughter of the big-shot corporation lawyer, the glittering sophisticated big-city heiress-wife of the small-town boy who made good in the major leagues . . .

"Here I am talking my head off when I should be meekly stretching out my hands for the

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handcuffs." Again Griselda laughed bitterly. "Do your duty, officer." She held out her joined wrists.

"Not so fast, Griselda," Ritter said. "You didn't say a word about Odds-on Gluck and his fifty grand. You didn't tell us why Pardell went unarmed to have a friendly dish of sauerkraut with a guy who had plenty reason to kill him."

Griselda lowered her arms and sighed. "I've been trying to tell you," she said. "It's all part of the same deal. Gluck took the rap for the high-and-mighty respectable pillars of society—for a price. They were all up to their armpits in the racket—rigged games, fixed races, the works—but Gluck agreed to go to the clink for a promised $50,000. And who do you suppose put up the cash? My poor old respectable crook of a father—and I still love him dearly."

"See?" Dr. Coffee turned to Ritter. "Petrarch and Chaucer were right. The patient and virtuous Griselda."

"Better get some of your personal stuff together before we go downtown," Ritter told Griselda. "Some toilet articles, maybe—or some extra fingernails."

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INDEX TO VOLUME FIFTY-NINE — JANUARY-JUNE 1972

ABBOTT, JOHN: The Telegram Code ..... May 107

ASIMOV, ISAAC: The Acquisitive Chuckle ..... Jan. 6

BARKIN, HASKELL: The Last Sassetta ..... June 49

BARRETT, MARY: Josephine Rider Said ..... May 87

BENSEN, D. R.: Criminalimerick (Holmes) ..... Jan. 97
Criminalimerick (Van der Valk) ..... Feb. 34
Criminalimerick (Poirot) ..... May 100

BIGGLE, JR., LLOYD: Grandfather and the Little Bone ..... Jan. 118

BLOCHMAN, LAWRENCE G.: Dr. Coffee and the Pardell Case ..... June 128

BRAND, CHRISTIANNA: Such a Nice Man ..... March 93

BREEN, JON L.: Gilliam's Tact ..... Feb. 26
The Body in the Bullpen ..... May 29
The Babe Ruth Murder Case ..... June 14

BRITTAIN, WILLIAM: Mr. Strang Checks a Record ..... Feb. 70
Wynken, Blynken, and Nod ..... April 124

CARR, JOHN DICKSON: The Jury Box ..... Jan. - June

CHRISTIE, AGATHA: The Incredible Theft ..... March 6
The Importance of a Leg of Mutton ..... May 94

CHRISTOPHER, JOHN: The Island of Bright Birds ..... Feb. 109

COYNE, JOHN: A Game in the Sun ..... March 114

CREASEY, JOHN *see* MARRIC, J. J.)

CURTIS, RICHARD: Life Story ..... May 66

DANIELS, HAROLD R.: Three Ways To Rob a Bank ..... March 32

DAVIDSON, AVRAM: How Could He Do It? ..... Jan. 66

DEFORD, MIRIAM ALLEN: Turnabout ..... Jan. 138
April Story ..... May 37

ECKELS, ROBERT EDWARD: The Munich Courier ..... Jan. 32
Never Trust a Partner ..... March 126
The Kidnaped Painting ..... June 6

ELY, DAVID: No Time To Lose ..... Jan. 145

FITZPATRICK, JAMES: What Hedgepeth Heard ..... April 43

FREELING, NICOLAS: Van der Valk and the False Caesar ..... Feb. 31
Van der Valk and the Man from Nowhere ..... May 12

FREMLIN, CELIA: Golden Tuesday ..... April 75

GALLAHUE, V. L.: Rest in Peace ..... Feb. 85

GILBERT, ANTHONY: A Day of Encounters ..... Feb. 146

GILBERT, MICHAEL: Mouse in a Trap ..... Jan. 152
The Curious Conspiracy ..... March 134
The Blackmailing of Mr. Justice Ball ..... April 150

GORES, JOE: File #6: Beyond the Shadow ..... Jan. 17
File #7: O Black and Unknown Bard ..... April 29

HENRY, O.: The Confession of ——— ..... March 122

HIGHSMITH, PATRICIA: Woodrow Wilson's Necktie ..... March 146

HOCH, EDWARD D.: The Theft of the Seven Ravens ..... Jan. 70
The Spy Without a Country ..... Feb. 131
The Spy Who Didn't Remember ..... April 6
The Theft of the Mafia Cat ..... May 16
The Spy and the Reluctant Courier ..... June 112

HOLDING, JAMES: The Borneo Snapshot Mystery ..... Jan. 84

KEATING, H. R. F.: Inspector Ghote and the Miracle ..... Jan. 111

LUMEN, FRITZI FRANZ: The Prayer Wheels ..... June 60

LYON, DANA: The Woman in the Stone House ..... May 101

MALZBERG, BARRY N.: Cornell ..... April 121

(Continued on page 127)

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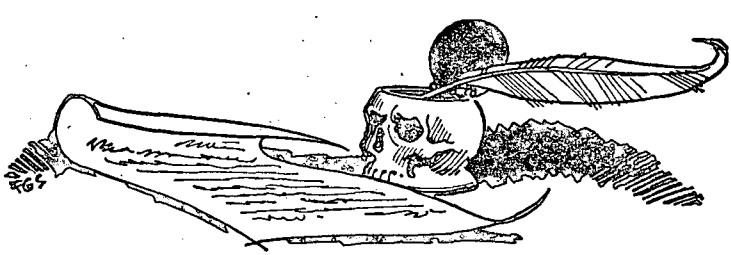

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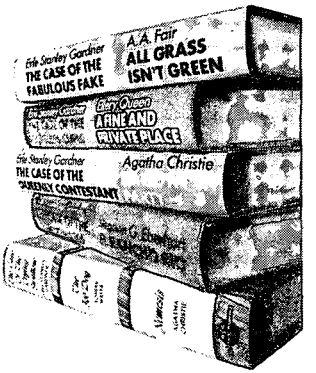

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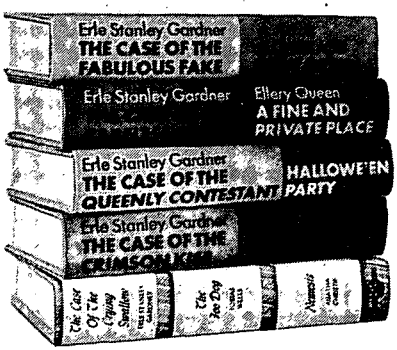

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